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VAL GIELGUD and ERIC MASCHWITZ

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THE TELEVISION MURDER

by

VAL GIELGUD
AND
ERIC MASCHWITZ

33rd Thousand

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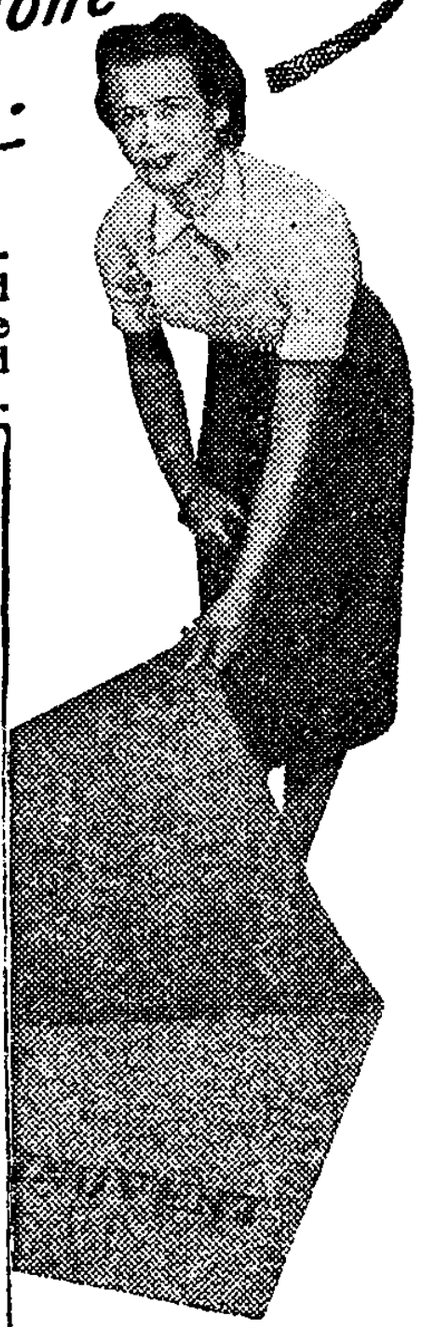

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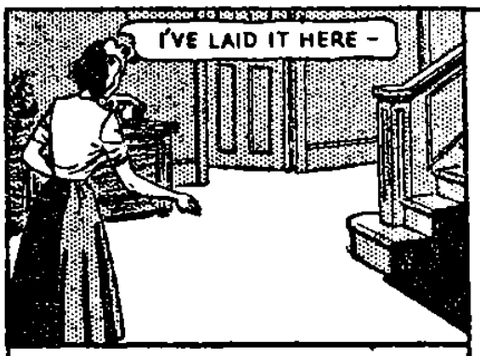

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THE TELEVISION MURDER

CHAPTER I

At Alexandra Palace

ONE DAY INSPECTOR SIMON Spears was going to ask them all 'Now please think back carefully to the beginning! What exactly were you doing on the morning of April the Eighth?' . . . and Miss Fellowes was going to remember that she had spent most of that particular morning in staring out of the window, while her employer, Mr. Winthrop Bruce, raged furiously on the telephone.

It was a good view, that . . . perhaps the finest in London. From the third floor of the corner of Alexandra Palace, in which the Television Service lived and moved and had its uneasy being, Miss Fellowes, secretary to the Director, could look across a bewildering chaos of roofs and streets to the towers of the Crystal Palace and the Surrey Hills, to the dome of St. Paul's, brooding majestically over the City. To her left, beyond the reservoirs, trains, tiny as caterpillars, crept Northwards.

Yes, it was a fine view all right . . . and in moments of trial there always seemed to be something comforting in its breadth and

serenity. She wished, though, that Mr. Bruce would stop snorting like an enraged grampus over the letter which had just arrived—and let her know what exactly was worrying him!

Mr. Bruce could be very trying. Not that he hadn't plenty of worries . . . personally Miss Fellowes couldn't imagine any other man on earth who could have held the post of B.B.C. Television Director for over two years without developing foam at the mouth and straws in the hair! But he could be very trying . . . and this had been 'one of those mornings'!

First of all that letter from the Fifth or Sixth Lord of the Admiralty, refusing to be televised if he had to wear make-up ("All right! let him look like a dug-up corpse if he wants to!"), then a wire-crackling row with Broadcasting House over finance for the forthcoming Derby broadcast ("You people always expect ruddy miracles for a shilling!"), and finally the usual weekly moan from Stephen Crawford who never seemed to be able to find enough actresses and explorers to fill up that 'Picture Parade' programme of his ("Get out of here, Steve, before I murder you!").

The meditations of Miss Fellowes were interrupted by a final snort from her employer. Mr. Bruce rose majestically from his desk and threw the irritating letter in front of her.

"Call that number!" he said. "And get me Mr. Calthrop on the line!" Then he in his turn walked over to the window and apparently lost himself in contemplation of that prodigious view.

She asked hurriedly for the Mayfair number at the head of the paper, then glanced down the letter for an explanation of Mr. Bruce's irritation.

The Guards Club,
Brook Street, W.1.

My dear Bruce,

Sorry to bother you when you must be so busy, but the Countess Ferrari—you know, Gloria van Zuyl—is very keen to be taken over your show at A.P. and has asked me to try and fix it with you. May I bring her along some time when things are not too hectic?

Yours as ever,
David Calthrop.

As she looked up, to meet Winthrop Bruce's eye, the face of Miss Fellowes betrayed considerable excitement.

"Well—?" asked her employer impolitely. "And what's the matter with *you*?"

"Not th-*the* Gloria van Zuyl, Mr. Bruce?"

"I don't suppose there are two of them?"

"The Twenty Million Dollar Girl?"

"Is that what they call her?" he asked with

a shrug. Really, Mr. Bruce could be very annoying, pretending never to have heard of anybody. "Why on earth does everybody have to have some tuppenny-ha'penny label tacked on to them nowadays?"

"But don't you want to meet her?"

"I've no doubt she's a very charming girl," replied Mr. Bruce with some asperity, "but I'm getting a little tired of having to show people round this place as though it were the Zoo on Bank Holiday!"

"Oh!" said Miss Fellowes, largely to prevent herself saying something she might be sorry for . . . and added, with a touch of asperity that matched Mr. Bruce's own, "Mr. Calthrop on the line. Will you speak to him?"

. . . . .

"Of course really he was thrilled, but you know 'Winnie' and his poses; he wouldn't ever admit he was interested in anything in skirts."

Thus Miss Fellowes an hour later, as she swung her attractive legs from a table in the Make-up Room.

She was talking to Josephine Easton who was busy tidying up her powders and grease-paints after making-up the last of the chorus for a rehearsal of *The Beggar's Opera*. Miss Easton—known to all and sundry at Alexandra Palace as 'Jo' and a perfect darling—was

assistant to the Head of the Make-up Department. With her smooth dark hair and laughing eyes she was pretty enough to be an announcer, or even a Television star. Before joining the B.B.C. she had worked as a mannequin in Paris and New York, then with a leading firm of make-up experts in Hollywood.

"So she's coming, is she?"

"You bet!" laughed Miss Fellowes. "This afternoon—'Winnie' couldn't fix it soon enough. Of course, he's just as anxious to see her as the rest of us!"

"Gloria van Zuyl," said Jo, thoughtfully. "I used to see her quite often in California—poor kid!"

"Poor?" Miss Fellowes' tone was indignant. "I don't call being the richest girl in the world 'poor'!"

"You might if you had to put up with all she has. I was out there during the big kidnapping scare. She got letters like the rest of 'em . . . only rather worse; the gentle blackmailer in question threatened to spray her face with vitriol if she didn't hand over half a million dollars!"

"Oh, *that!*" said Miss Fellowes.

"It's not much fun, Fellowes. Think of having to take half a dozen strong-arm thugs along as a bodyguard every time you go to a party . . . sending a double in your place to

the Opera . . . driving a car made of steel plate and bullet-proof glass!"

"I know, but she'll be all right now; she's married and she's settled over here!"

"Mm," Jo admitted, "it must be a relief for her to be in this right little, tight little island. I wouldn't be too sure, though, about her husband. Did you ever see Count Benito Ferrari?"

"No," said Miss Fellowes, "but he looks delirious in the *Tatler*!"

"He is—delirious! He's a Greek god with the figure of Johnny Weissmuller, but he had an awful reputation with the girls out on the Coast—and with a mouth like that I don't wonder!"

"He sounds rather exciting!"

"Rather too exciting, if you ask me!"

"And is she really as rich as everybody says?"

Jo Easton shook her head. "Not yet, but she will be; she comes into her grandfather's fortune when he dies . . . old Abraham van Zuyl, who made millions when they first struck oil in Texas. He's as old as God and practically bed-ridden, so I guess it won't be long now before she gets her twenty million!"

Miss Fellowes' eyes had the glaze of the complete and utter fan. "Isn't it *romantic*?" she said with a sigh.

"I wonder!" said Jo Easton as she swept the

last of the lipsticks into a drawer. "Coming to lunch?"

"Yes. I've got to hurry, too . . . must be back at two-thirty to take letters!"

"Not to mention seeing Miss van Zuyl!"

"Well, yes," Miss Fellowes admitted as they headed for the Canteen.

"I think I'll kill 'Winnie' if he doesn't bring her up to the office!"

. . . . .

"Gloria van Zuyl? Okay, Bruce, I'll be there, with bells on—and photographers!"

Jim Churchman replaced the telephone receiver—and did not apologize to his visitor for the interruption. Jim, slim, bald-headed, tough ex-newspaperman from the North, was in charge of Press Publicity at Alexandra Palace. It was therefore his almost daily duty to interview Dudley Northcote of the *Wire*. Jim couldn't stand Northcote. Very few people could!

Northcote, who had been lounging in an easy chair during Jim's conversation with 'Winnie' Bruce and was now sitting up with an interested expression on his long thin face, was the most hated and most feared personality in radio journalism (also the most widely read—that was why Jim Churchman and his colleagues had to put up with the fellow!).

He had come to London from Canada some years before and immediately claimed attention in Fleet Street with his shamelessly intimate interviewing of celebrities. This year, with Television one of the major topics of the day, he had been made Radio Editor of the *Wire*.

He was a puzzle, this Dudley Northcote. His drawling voice and long elegant hands suggested Eton and Oxford rather than the Wild West. His private hobbies were known to be the collecting of 18th century prints and the writing of Latin Verse—which scarcely seemed to fit in with the appalling sensationalism of the stuff which he served up in that daily column of his. He had no known friends—and didn't seem to care!

"Van Zuyl, eh? Got her for a programme?"

"No," replied Jim Churchman shortly. "Just a visitor!"

"That'll do just as well. Seen this?" The journalist opened a copy of his own paper which lay on his lap and threw it deftly across the desk. "Column three!"

Churchman lit a cigarette and began to read:

FATAL RUBY FOR HEIRESS

VAN ZUYL BUYS 'THRONE'

(From Our Amsterdam Correspondent)

Considerable excitement has been caused by the purchase, from the estate of the late Mynheer

van Zeeland, of the phenomenal ruby known as 'The Peacock Throne.' Though the actual transaction has been carried out through agents here, the purchaser is known to be the Countess Ferrari, better known as Miss Gloria van Zuyl, heiress to the van Zuyl millions, and the price, in the neighbourhood of $150,000, is believed to constitute a record. 'The Peacock Throne' has a strange history. Stolen by a French sergeant during the sacking of the Summer Palace in Pekin, the ruby has since passed through a number of hands, in each case bringing death or disaster in its wake. The original purchaser, the Duc de Calangue, was killed in a balloon accident shortly after adding the stone to his collection. It then passed into the hands of Ten Eyck Jameson of Atlanta, Georgia, who within three days of receiving the stone from Europe died of a rare disease. It was bought by the English connoisseur, William Mathieson; soon afterwards he lost his wife and three children in the disaster of the *Titanic*. The ruby next appeared in Madrid where . . .

Without troubling to finish the article, Churchman looked up. "Some of your tripe?" he asked.

Northcote grinned. "Not actually from the Master's pen—but I have my disciples!" He stretched languidly and rose from his chair. "Time for a drink, my little Civil Servant! What time does she get here?"

"Van Zuyl? Three o'clock—but you won't be there!"

"Oh, but I shall. She's quite a story—and

my noble proprietor would never forgive me, if I lost it!"

Churchman shrugged with resignation. "Okay!" he said. "Let's get that drink!" A refusal would only mean trouble . . . and Winthrop Bruce didn't want any trouble for Television just now.

They strolled down the passage side by side, Churchman wondering how anyone could be as unlikeable as Northcote and still live. "Oh, and by the by," said the journalist, apparently at a tangent, "it isn't such tripe as you think! Old van Zeeland died the day he got the ruby!" He paused, then added with that infuriating grin of his, "And who goes next? Miss Gloria van Zuyl?"

• • • • •

She had arrived . . . in a grey Bentley . . . with Mr. David Calthrop of His Majesty's Welsh Guards. The commissionaire on the door had seen her and, when announcing her arrival to Miss Fellowes over the telephone, had added, confidentially, that "she was a slasher." Miss Fellowes herself had spent fifteen glorious minutes contemplating her fair loveliness. And those clothes! Perfectly tailored coat and skirt, blue-fox necklet, absurdly tilted French hat, American shoes

and sheer stockings . . . well, Miss Fellowes knew something about clothes (she wasn't too preoccupied, though, to be amused by the way 'Winnie' was purring over his beautiful visitor, like a large cat with a particularly attractive kitten!).

And now she was in the studio, where Producer Jeremy Pickles, with a company of actors, a battalion of musicians and apparently a brigade of engineers in leather jackets and pull-overs, was engaged in rehearsing *The Beggar's Opera.*

Gloria van Zuyl was interested; that was one of her greatest charms: that in defiance of the wealth and luxury of everything she had ever known, she was always interested in what went on around her. She had seen plenty of film studios during her time in Hollywood—great barn-like hangars filled with lights and dust and shouting—but, as she confessed to Winthrop Bruce, standing at her side, the apparent chaos of a Television studio out-Warnered Metro-Goldwyn!

It must be admitted, though, that, if Gloria van Zuyl was interested in the studio, the studio's denizens were rather more than interested in Gloria van Zuyl. Even engineers, those masters of minding their own business, found moments in which to look at her, while the great grey cameras crawled to and fro during 'panning shots' and the boom-micro-

phone was swung so delicately overhead to catch sound and yet keep out of picture.

Even Jeremy Pickles, who was in the habit of working on productions, week in, week out, for an average of fourteen hours a day (having apparently no other interest in the world), found a moment to glance down from the Control Gallery. His Vision and Sound Mixing engineers, who had never before seen Jeremy take his eyes off his two screens, or his lips away from his microphone, waited for a typical expression of disapproval at the entry of visitors during rehearsal. It did not come; Jeremy merely whistled absent-mindedly, causing his stage-managers below—who were of course wearing headphones—to jump, and wonder whether their producer had suddenly gone mad.

Jo Easton was on duty. Neat and trim in her white linen coat, it was her job to stand by the 'check back' screen at the side of the studio floor, watching the rehearsal for signs of faulty make-up. Occasionally, however, her eyes wandered from the little tented screen to where the 'Twenty Million Dollar Girl' stood at Winthrop Bruce's side, with David Calthrop close behind her, while beyond them in a high-power blaze of light 18th century trollops and cutpurses moved gracefully to the tripping music of long ago . . . but it was

David Calthrop who interested her—not Gloria van Zuyl!

David Calthrop . . . there was apparently little to distinguish that rather elegant young man with his fair curled moustache and clove carnation from fifty other officers of the Brigade—until you noticed his eyes. They were unusual eyes, of flecked dark amber, like the eyes of an animal . . . drowsy, passionate, watchful. And they never left Gloria van Zuyl for a moment. Interesting, thought Jo . . . and dangerous.

"Pretty, isn't he?" The sudden whisper in her ear made her start round. She knew who it was without looking . . . and she didn't like Dudley Northcote any more than did Jim Churchman or the rest of them.

The newspaperman was regarding her with his usual mocking glance (a "mental undresser" was Jo's term for him!). Ever since he first came to interview her in the Make-up Room, Northcote had treated her with a scornful casualness, varying invitations to supper with sarcastic references to "little five-quid-a-weekers with legs like Ginger Rogers." Gosh, how she disliked that man!

"*Very* pretty, but who is he?"

"His name's Mr. Calthrop and he's a friend of Miss van Zuyl's."

"A friend, eh? What kind of a 'friend'?"

Jo turned impatiently away. "If you think

I'm going to help you with your grubby little gossip paragraphs——!"

"Human stories!" he corrected gently. "Thumbnail sketches of ze life as she is lived . . . and maybe this is one of them!"

"I'm sorry, but I'm supposed to be watching this rehearsal," she said with a sudden shudder of disgust—and this time frankly turned her back. When she looked cautiously round again, she was relieved to see that Northcote had been captured by Stephen Crawford, the long-haired, untidy producer of 'Picture Parade.' All right, let Steve have him; he wasn't particular whom he talked to, as long as he could get publicity for that ewe-lamb programme of his!

Meanwhile David Calthrop stood apart, unaware that he was the centre of a minor squall. He was watching Gloria and thinking of her. She seemed quite unconscious of the effect her entrance had had upon everyone in the studio . . . and, as he watched her leaning eagerly forward for Bruce's whispered explanations, seemed to appreciate more vividly than ever that almost childish directness which for him made up so much of her charm. If only she wasn't married—if only she hadn't got so much money—if only he had a few thousand a year more than his pay—if only . . . if only . . .!

As though to put an end to his troubling

thoughts, the rehearsal ended on a great blare of music. At one end of the studio the conductor disentangled himself from his rostrum and went into earnest conference with his First Violinist and Sound Engineer; at the other the actors slowly dispersed in the direction of their dressing-rooms. The famous baritone who played MacHeath passed close by the silent young man with the clove carnation, humming as he went:

"When the heart of a man is depressed with Cares
The gloom is dispelled when a Woman appears . . ."

David Calthrop smiled. It was an amusing commentary on his own thoughts!

"I think we might go up to the Control Gallery now," said Winthrop Bruce, leading the way back into the long passage that ran all along one side of the studio. "Think you could face a vertical iron ladder and a pretty foul atmosphere, Miss van Zuyl?"

"I guess so," Gloria answered with a smile, "if you'll lead the way, Mr. Bruce . . . and David's there to catch me if I fall!"

"I'll be there," said Calthrop.

"Then let's go!"

But before they could reach the foot of the ladder in question, there was an interruption; Miss Fellowes appeared in the doorway.

bristling with tidings and with pleasure at having another opportunity to look at Gloria van Zuyl. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Bruce . . . but the Countess Ferrari is wanted on the telephone!"

"Couldn't you explain—?" began Bruce irritably.

"It's Count Ferrari," went on the secretary. "He—he insisted on speaking to the Countess immediately!"

For a moment Gloria hesitated. Calthrop bent forward and laid his hand on her arm. "Let me talk to him!" he said.

"No, no, David. I'll go!" Though she had gone pale for a moment, her voice was quite steady as she turned to the worshipping Miss Fellowes and added, "If you'll be kind enough to show me the way——"

From across the room Dudley Northcote watched her go. Then he turned to Stephen Crawford with his usual sarcastic grin. "You're always worrying about a star for your blessed 'Picture Parade'—well, there she goes!"

"Gloria van Zuyl? You don't think that she'd—?" The young producer was ingenuously thrilled by the idea.

"Well, why not try? She's a very interesting young lady! Easy on the eye for any viewer! And there's that ruby, y'know . . . with the curse on it!"

"I wonder!" murmured Crawford. "I guess I'd better ask 'Winnie,' though!"

Winthrop Bruce, when he turned to look for him, was standing facing David Calthrop. The arrival of the telephone message and the little scene which it had brought in its wake had created a certain atmosphere of constraint between them. The Director of Television groped vainly for words with which to pass off the tension of the moment. But he need not have worried . . . David Calthrop saved him the trouble.

"One day," he said, in a low hard voice that was just loud enough for Bruce to hear, "I think I shall break that damned Italian's neck!"

CHAPTER II

'The Peacock Throne'

'SO,' THOUGHT BRUCE, AS THE Guardsman turned away, to cover his embarrassment, 'he's in love with her, is he? Don't blame him; she's lovely . . . amusing, too. But that husband of hers . . .!' He had met Ferrari once, at some Savoy Hotel reception or other—the 'damned Italian' was a well-known Radio Amateur, with that Hampstead house of his chock full of experimental gear—and he agreed with Jo Easton's estimation of the Count. 'Pity, though, for his career if he gets himself in a mess there!'

"Sorry, 'Winnie,'" said Calthrop quietly. "I can't think what's the matter with me these days!"

"Forget it, old son. We all get like that sometimes!"

"Not enough early nights!" Calthrop added, with a smile that was plainly an effort . . . and was visibly relieved when Stephen Crawford dashed up unceremoniously to tackle his Chief on the subject of 'Picture Parade' and Gloria van Zuyl.

It was a composed and smiling Gloria who returned from telephoning in Bruce's office. Nothing in her face betrayed the emotion of a few minutes before.

"Sorry," she said, "it was just my husband . . . he's always wondering where I am and what I'm doing!"

"Then it's a pity," replied the Television Director, "that we can't put you in front of one of those cameras and televise you right away so that he can be quite sure that you're *here*!"

"That certainly would just about prove it!" she said—and added with a laugh, "I'd probably look a mess, though . . . no Camera Face!"

"Like to try?" asked Bruce.

"You mean that you'd——?"

"Televise you? Right now . . . on closed circuit, of course . . . just from the floor here up to the Control Gallery!"

"Oh, but, Mr. Bruce, I'd be just crazy to!"

"Then let's go!" he said, delighted at the opportunity to show off the efficiency of his staff when faced with an emergency.

So, within three minutes, Jo Easton was performing delicate adjustments to Gloria's make-up, using for the most part a small pot of what looked like condensed *café au lait* . . . lights blazed up with an intensity that almost hurt . . . two cameras were being wheeled into

position . . . Stephen Crawford was showing the new recruit where to stand and marking round her size-two shoes with white chalk . . . Jim Churchman's photographers were recording the scene for Press Records . . . and David Calthrop was following Bruce up the perilous iron ladder which let to a Holy of Holies filled with screens and dials and control-panels.

The Control Gallery was hazy with smoke . . . and Producer Jeremy Pickles with the big nose, big spectacles and rather pointed ears sat surrounded by the crushed corpses of cigarettes. Pickles the Insatiable, unwearied by six hours of rehearsal for *The Beggar's Opera,* seemed to be enjoying the experience of putting an heiress on the screen!

"But she's *good!*" he said in that high excited voice of his . . . and that was praise from Mr. Pickles who had averaged fourteen hours a day for the past two years looking at Faces!

David Calthrop peered curiously through the smoky half-darkness. Pickles was sitting at a little desk on which was nothing but a microphone—through which he addressed his stage-managers on the floor below—a shaded light, by which to study the complications of his scripts, and three cue-light buttons. Behind him was the Vision Engineer sitting at the controls that governed the mixing of

'shots' from camera to camera; to his left the Sound Engineer leaned over his panel; in front of him were two Television screens, one showing the actual 'shot' in progress, the other a 'pre-view' of what the camera to which he proposed to mix next would show.

The right-hand screen showed Gloria in 'close-up.' Her smiling loveliness, so warm and alive even in monochrome, filled Calthrop with wonder; this was his first sight of modern Television; he had had no idea that it could be so clear and vivid.

A turn of one knob—and the picture faded; a twist of another and, as it went, it was replaced by a full-length image of the girl in the studio below, picked up by the more distant of the two cameras. Calthrop watched, fascinated. She seemed to be looking straight at him now. "Hello there, David," she said, "how do you like the new star?" . . . and forgetting that she was only an image carried to him by electrical impulse, he answered her, "But, darling, you look *grand*!"

Winthrop Bruce laughed. Jeremy Pickles allowed his gnomelike countenance to wrinkle in a grin. "There you are, 'Winnie'—we've got him! A new convert to the 'Miracle of the Modern Age'!"

* * * * *

It was in the Make-up Room, ten minutes

after this unconventional 'audition,' that Dudley Northcote at last managed to corner Gloria van Zuyl. Unabashed by Winthrop Bruce's obvious efforts to keep him from her, the sardonic newspaperman pushed open the door just as Gloria, watched admiringly by Jo Easton, was restoring her make-up to outdoor proportions.

"Will you please—" began Jo, catching sight of him in the mirror; but the hated Northcote was too quick for her. "Sorry to butt in, Miss van Zuyl—or should it be 'Countess'?—but it's my job to tell the world who comes to visit this box of tricks and what they think of it!"

To Jo's discomfiture Gloria did not seem to resent the intrusion. Once Northcote had introduced himself, she began to talk gaily about her experience in the studio . . . and Winthrop Bruce, coming in a few minutes later with Calthrop, found them deep in conversation.

"Hello, 'Winnie'!" Northcote loved to tease Bruce by using the nickname. "I've just been getting the low-down from your latest discovery. When's she coming into the programmes, though?"

Bruce, restraining an inclination to punch the journalist forcibly on the nose, looked inquiringly at Gloria. "Well, I was going to mention it," he admitted, "now that you've

broken the ice. Countess, there's a young fellow out there who'd give his right hand for a chance to have you in 'Picture Parade' one week!"

Gloria frowned. "You mean actually broadcast? It's good of you, but—I don't think I could. You see," she added wistfully, "all this publicity racket rather got me down in the States. I don't want to start anything over here!"

David Calthrop emphatically agreed.

"And seconded!" said Northcote. "Though we're not quite as tough over this side, not even the worst of us! However, Countess, if you don't want to appear in the newspapers, you mustn't go buying $150,000 rubies!"

She smiled, a little ruefully. "I'll say that you boys certainly have gone to Town over the 'Peacock Throne'!"

Northcote leaned eagerly forward. "It must be a pretty lovely stone," he said.

'Damn it,' thought Bruce, 'the fellow's interviewing her!' But Gloria didn't seem to mind. "Well, perhaps you'd like to see it!" she said . . . and before any of them could reply, she had opened her initialled hand-bag, rummaged among a miscellaneous collection of compacts, lipsticks and lace handkerchiefs, and produced a largish twist of tissue paper. "There!" she exclaimed and, unwrapping the paper, spilled its contents on to the glass table.

Jo Easton let out an audible gasp. The famous ruby, around which so much legend and superstition had gathered in thirty years, could have been very little smaller than a five-shilling piece, rather flat in shape but exquisitely cut and polished, with a colour in the heart of it that was rich and deep like that of a fine Burgundy.

For a moment they were all silent. Then Calthrop spoke, sharply and rather irritably. "For God's sake, Glory—don't tell me you carry the thing about—just like that!"

Gloria smiled. "Just like that, my dear. You thought it was in a vault, didn't you—so did Mr. Northcote here. If anyone was trying to steal it now, they'd be drilling holes in the Bank of England or something . . . and yet all the while it floats around in my handbag! I'm sorry," she added, almost petulantly, "but I can't stand people who've got lovely things and never let them see the light of day!"

Preposterous though her argument seemed, with a small fortune lying there on the make-up table, Winthrop Bruce realized that she was perfectly sincere . . . in some strange way this more-than-twentieth-century young woman reflected the spirit of the Renaissance, when rare and beautiful things were made not for museums but to be worn and used.

But Calthrop was not to be mollified. While

the others handled the ruby admiringly, he glanced at his wrist-watch. "Five o'clock, Glory," he snapped. "Time you were getting back!"

"So late? Then I guess it'll have to be good-bye, Mr. Bruce—unless you'd care to drive back to Hampstead for a cocktail?"

The Television Director, handing the 'Peacock Throne' back to its owner, noted the irritation in Calthrop's eyes as Gloria carelessly twisted it in its paper again and dropped it among the contents of her bag. "That's very charming of you," he said. "As a matter of fact, I do have to be in St. John's Wood at seven, so——"

"Then we'll be moving!" Gloria smiled good-bye to the others.

"Good-bye, Mr. Northcote—and go slow on that story, otherwise I may have somebody slugging me on the head in a deep, dark alley-way! Good-bye, Miss—Easton, is it?—and thanks a lot for my first Television Face!"

She turned towards the door, but Dudley Northcote wasn't finished with her yet. "I won't tell them where you keep it," he said, "but there's just one more question I'd like to ask. All those stories about the 'Peacock Throne' and its—er—unfortunate effect—don't they scare you just a little?"

"No," she said in a level tone that was almost rude in its dismissal. "No, they don't

—not at all!" And with a final flashing smile to Jo Easton, she went her way.

. . . . .

The Ferraris' house in Hampstead had provided hard-pressed gossip writers with more than one paragraph. It stood in splendid isolation, guarded from the democratic contacts of Middle Heath Road by about a quarter of a mile of drive, a remarkable barrage of wrought-iron railings, a considerable landscape garden and some quite magnificent trees. The last-named alone remained of the splendours of the original Queen Anne house, which had achieved a slightly raffish reputation through its first owner, one of the more prominent members of the Hell Fire Club. That house—appropriately perhaps—was destroyed by fire during the middle Victorian era; the site had remained, unoccupied and sinister, until just after the War when a profiteer had bought it and established thereon what was generally referred to as a "Mansion of unique proportions and unusual amenities." Ferrari had bought it, with his wife's money, a week after Gloria had made up her mind to make Great Britain her permanent home . . .

Winthrop Bruce looked round the vast white drawing-room with steadily increasing

curiosity. His professional pride was pleased by the sight of one of the latest Television receivers standing in a corner. But his æsthetic instincts were also gratified by the magnificent white bearskin rugs, a single and undoubted Correggio above the fireplace—the only picture in the room—and three magnificent trophies of arms, swords by the French and Spanish masters, one decorating each wall.

Gloria rang a bell, and almost immediately a butler appeared, wheeling a cocktail table.

"Is the Count in, Bastin?"

"I believe not, m'lady."

Somewhat to his irritation, Bruce realized that the butler was very thoroughly looking him over. He had taken a dislike to the man at sight: a baldish fellow with shaggy eyebrows over chilly grey eyes, and plump hairy hands.

"Then will you forgive me for a moment, Mr. Bruce? Please help yourself to a cocktail . . . and perhaps you'll mix me a 'Gibson'—one part French to four of gin. I'll be right back!"

She went out, the butler at her heels. The man walked a little on tiptoe, giving an effect that was at the same time pompous and faintly menacing. Bruce gibed gently at himself for allowing his imagination to run away with him, and picked up a Venetian glass decanter of gin. Outside the long French windows the

shadows streamed over the grass, and the great copper-beeches and cedars loomed very black against a fantastic Turneresque sunset, all crimson and gold. Bruce was suddenly aware of the amazing silence of the house, which must be one of its greatest advantages. London, broadcasting, traffic, Alexandra Palace seemed miles and centuries away. There was something after all in possessing a hundred pounds a minute . . . !

That silence was suddenly broken—by the sound of a harsh masculine voice raised in anger. Bruce, looking up sharply from his cocktail-mixing, realized that the butler had failed to close the drawing-room door properly behind him. He moved towards it . . . then curiosity defeated good manners.

"I tell you, Gloria, I will not have it!" The voice was slightly foreign, each word separate and distinct, as English people seldom speak their own language. "This has been settled between us. No one is to see him; he is to be left quite alone. The doctor orders it. He is too weak to be troubled with any foolish scenes!"

There was an inaudible reply from Gloria van Zuyl.

"I warn you to be careful!" the harsh voice went on, rising shrilly on a gust of rage. "You shall not disregard my wishes. You shall not go about with young Calthrop as you do. I

know all about him, *carissima mia.* I know that you were with him to-day . . ."

Bruce drew a sharp breath—for that broken sentence had been completed by something that sounded very like a blow! He went to the door. As he did so, he heard the sound of a woman sobbing—and soft footsteps pattered upstairs. He saw descending the staircase a magnificent figure of a man: at least six-foot three in height and broad in proportion, with a slim waist, neat hands and feet, dark eyes blazing out of an olive skin, and a high-bridged Roman nose. He had something of the air of a falcon; cruel, arrogant, and essentially swift. He wore a well-cut flannel suit with distinction, and swung a small dog-whip from one wrist. A big German police-dog pattered down the stairs behind him.

At the foot of the stairs he stopped to bow formally from the waist.

"My name is Benito Ferrari. We met, I think, at the Radio Research banquet last year. My wife asks me to apologize to you. But,she does not feel very well. She has gone to lie down."

There was a little silence. The dog growled, and Ferrari flicked at it with the whip.

"Then," said Bruce awkwardly, "I feel I should get along. I've an appointment at seven . . ."

The Count gave no sign of urging his visitor

at least to finish his cocktail. Without further words he escorted the Television Director to the door.

Bruce's final impression of the Ferrari household was of the Count's tall figure, in black silhouette against the white *décor* of his hall, his whip dangling, the dog grinning beside him. Many days later, when he described that unceremonious departure to Inspector Spears, he was to be amazed how closely the detail of the scene had stayed with him. At the moment, though, his chief feeling was one of sympathy for Gloria van Zuyl . . . and David Calthrop, too!

Chapter III

Arrival of Boat-Train

THE FOLLOWING MORNING JIM Churchman was in a vile temper. Jo Easton looked into his office just before eleven, with the suggestion that they might drink a cup of coffee together . . . and found a man with a face as yellow as a guinea, disgracefully rumpled hair and a distraught expression, trying to answer two telephones at once, his chair surrounded with newspapers in various stages of disintegration.

"Sorry . . . sorry . . . couldn't help it. No, I tell you—it was a private visit. Hold on a minute, old man—someone on the other line . . . Who? Oh, yes, good morning! Sorry and all that but Northcote happened to be here! . . . Well, why don't some of you lads stick around, too—then maybe *you'd* get the stories. . . . All right, then, *write* in to Broadcasting House if you want to—get me fired—I'd be glad!" He slammed down one receiver and picked up the other. "Hello? . . . Hello? . . . Damn it, now he's gone!"

"Coffee, Jim? You look as though you needed it!"

"Sorry, Jo, but I'm up to the eyes!" He

kicked savagely at the newspapers round his feet. "Every radio editor in Fleet Street is on my tail because Northcote's scooped the van Zuyl story. They seem to think I'm a kind of Universal Aunt to save 'em trouble. And Northcote's due here in five minutes! Confound him . . . and confound Gloria van Zuyl, too . . . what does she want to come hopping about in front of the cameras for!"

Jo smoothed his hair expertly with one cool hand. Jim was rather a friend of hers. "Is that the only trouble, Jim? How about the liver?"

He smiled at her grimly. "Is it my fault, Jo, if I have to spend half the night in the Fleet Street Club, helping to keep the boys sweet?"

"I wouldn't know, Jim. What time did you get home?"

"As we aren't married, I'll tell you. Half-past three!"

"Whew! whisky—or poker?"

"You want to know a bit too much," growled Churchman. "As a matter of fact, there was a poker game, but I didn't play. I did take a drink, though!"

"I know—all in the way of business! The nobility with which you boys sacrifice your young lives for the B.B.C.—!" Jo laughed—and was just quick enough to dodge the file of newspapers which he threw at her.

"For Heaven's sake, Jo, I'm busy!"

"Just one request, my lord, then I'll leave you with your hang-over!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Keep Dudley Northcote in here till I'm likely to be out of the Canteen!"

"Been bothering you again?"

"It's only that he gets on my nerves a little," the girl confessed. "When he's around I feel that I can't call my legs my own . . . and I don't really like off-colour stories!" She paused, then added, "Am I being a little fool, Jim, or is he rather frightening?"

"Both!" replied Churchman. "But say the word and I'll push his face in! I don't know how he does it. I left him in the Club at three o'clock, still playing poker and down the drain to the tune of nearly three hundred quid!"

"Three hundred? Is there that much money in the world, Jim?"

Churchman shrugged his shoulders. "He used to have money in the old days. Eton and Oxford and all the trimmings . . . collected old prints and whatnot . . . paid to have that poetry of his published. Then the family went smash—something to do with the 1929 Crash in America—and he had to get a job. Now, I suppose, he can't forget all his old habits. He must have the vitality of an ostrich, though—to be able to hang around

here all day, spend the whole of most nights over a poker-game, and still be able to turn in a story like the one he's done this morning!" He glared irritably at the copy of the *Wire* which lay open on his desk. "I'd like to burn it—and him!"

"Would I be the subject of conversation?" came a smooth voice from the doorway behind them.

"I wish," said Churchman coldly, "that you would have yourself announced!"

Dudley Northcote laughed. "Don't blame you, James. I'd wish the same—if Miss Easton were with me!"

Jo wheeled on him. "And don't blame *me,* if one day I spit in your eye!"

"Miss Easton," said the journalist, "I'm afraid that you are no lady!"

"I don't care what you're afraid of!" Jo replied. "So long, Jim!" and without another glance at Northcote, sailed from the room.

Northcote sat down and crossed one leg deliberately over the other.

"I see that you're studying my little masterpiece. Nice little story . . . and that van Zuyl's a good-looking gal! Don't forget to let me know when you televise her!"

"You needn't worry," said Churchman coldly. "She isn't going to be televised."

"Not?" The query came out surprisingly, like a shot from a gun.

"*Not!*" replied Churchman with finality. "So let's leave 'Winnie' Bruce's private visitors out of it—and get on with our business. You'll probably want to carry something on the O.B. from Waterloo next week . . . the 'Ruritania' boat-train . . . catching the celebrities and interviewing them as they arrive. Bruce himself is going down with the Van. There's a rumour about Garbo . . ."

"Go on!" said Northcote languidly. "I'm listening . . . just!"

. . . . .

Standing unobtrusively apart from the big green O.B. (Outside Broadcast) Van that loomed like a giant among the waiting taxis, Winthrop Bruce surveyed the boat-train arrival platform with eyes that missed singularly little. Clustered round the television-camera, his engineers were checking up over the telephone with the Sound and Vision men in the Van itself, while a crowd of porters stood goggling at the mass of cables that writhed from the camera to the van and from the van to some distant power-point in the Station Hall. Television-in-action could still draw its crowd. But in another few years . . . ! Bruce's thoughts went back to early broadcasting days at Savoy Hill when the mere appearance of a single microphone in a theatre or a dance hall had been the signal for excitement!

Between the microphone and the camera stood Bill Hasluck, the famous 'Television Adonis' and Outside Commentator. Hasluck was plainly nervous, buttoning and unbuttoning his coat, playing with the flower in his lapel. Bruce waved to him encouragingly; these unrehearsed interviews were no joke; in front of microphones, to say nothing of Television cameras, they were apt to be tricky . . . even disastrous.

Just beyond Hasluck, Susan Campbell—his feminine opposite number—looking very smart and entirely self-possessed, was observing with distaste the crowd of professional 'fans,' not unleavened with an element of youthful hooligans, which was gathered beyond the barrier to maul, push, yelp at and disgust any film-star who might happen to be included in the 'Ruritania's' passenger-list. From the size of that crowd, thought Bruce irritably, that absurd Garbo rumour must have spread. He looked anxiously at the camera; £500-worth of delicate mechanism behind a flimsy barrier of woodwork; at the coiling serpentine cables that could be so easily dragged out of place; at the Van itself, the intricate and exquisite gear of which would cost close upon £15,000 to renew. Crowds . . . mobs! The Engineer-in-Charge, as though reading his chief's thoughts, waved a cheerful and reassuring hand.

Bruce glanced down the passenger-list in his hand, provided by a helpful shipping company. Not quite so exciting as it might have been. Item One—Famous Conductor. Susan would probably snaffle him . . . he was believed to have an eye for a pretty girl. Two Opera Singers . . . trouble there for Bill Hasluck, unless he could get one clean away before he started on the other! An American Admiral . . . might be tricky . . . with a Service temper, possibly, and no sense of humour! A new troupe of Glamour Girls for Grosvenor House . . . probably looking like the wrath of God after being dragged on to the tender in a choppy sea! An Elder Statesman returning from New York . . . might be interesting, though dangerous if he once started talking politics! Lawrence Bly . . . now who the devil was Lawrence Bly? . . . seemed to know the name . . . still, it didn't matter, the list looked fairly promising . . . enough stuff to make a good twenty minutes!

His wrist-watch told him that the train was due in three minutes. Newspapermen were beginning to arrive; he could see Jim Churchman shepherding Dudley Northcote towards the mike. Clever fellow, Northcote, in spite of being such a thick-skinned sarcastic swine. He'd certainly made the most of that story this morning . . . noticed everything . . . never took any notes, either!

As the platform filled and the confusion grew, the thought of Winthrop Bruce turned to Gloria van Zuyl and the happenings of that afternoon at Alexandra Palace. An odd business altogether! And an oddly assorted triangle . . . Gloria—Calthrop—Ferrari. There could be no doubt that young Calthrop was in love with her, but knowing him and his prim conventional background Bruce was pretty sure that the thing had never got beyond the platonic stage. A married woman—and a celebrity . . . no, not David Calthrop! Nor did Gloria look the type to go hurling her bonnet over the windmill. Charming, attractive, yes—but 'unromantic,' in the way that the loveliest American girls could be!

No, the danger point must be Benito Ferrari. An Italian and an aristocrat . . . probably had fine old-fashioned foreign ideas about his honour! Then there was the mystery of the house in Hampstead. Had Ferrari actually used that dog-whip on his wife? And what was the mystery of the person whom Gloria was not to see? Who was being kept from her by order of the doctors? Why was the whole atmosphere of 'Five Cedars' (the name of that strange rambling mansion) as murky and unwholesome as a Venetian oubliette, for all its white panelling and elegant luxury?

The curiosity of Winthrop Bruce had been

most violently aroused. A pity, though, that Gloria hadn't accepted his invitation to be televised; he would have liked to have seen more of her, to have been able to study her and her background at closer quarters. As it was, he would most likely never see her again; he had had some experience of the very rich, their bursts of cordiality, the way they suddenly took one up—and as suddenly let one drop!

The train slid smoothly into the station. There followed the usual milling chaos of arrival: of surging porters, shouted endearments and welcomes, brandished handkerchiefs, piled mountains of heavy baggage. Bruce neatly trapped the Elder Statesman who was still wearing the tweed cap of a blameless crossing, whispered tactfully in his left ear and passed him to the tender mercies of Hasluck and the camera. Susan, contrary to all programme arrangements, was half-submerged in a sea of Glamour Girls.

And then the trouble began. Lawrence Bly, star of Screen and Stage ('Of course!' remembered Bruce, '*that* awful man!'), ex-husband of three millionairesses, hero of half-a-dozen smart screen comedies, the darling of a million fans, emerged, smiling diffidently, from his reserved compartment. To his arm clung nervously the fourth Mrs. Bly—a curiously faded and jaded and dowdy little

woman with some remarkable sables. There was a blaze of sasha-lights, a clicking of cameras. "Bly-y-y!" hissed the fans, and promptly proceeded to go crazy. There was a rush, and a howling as of demented jackals . . . and Mr. Lawrence Bly proved his essential common sense by jumping back into the train, drawing down the blinds of his *coupé* and flatly declining to budge!

In the course of this rough-and-tumble, various pleasant, harmless and distinguished people, including several of Winthrop Bruce's would-be victims, were quite unpleasantly man-handled. The Television Director himself was thrust violently away from one of the Opera singers—whom he was doing his best to keep in play—and found himself hard put to it to keep his feet . . .

He was actually swept against the side of the O.B. Van. There, steadying himself with one hand and trying to straighten his hat with the other, he found himself facing Gloria van Zuyl, at a range of perhaps three feet.

"Not such fun, this, Countess!" he called out breathlessly. "Can I help you? Looking for anyone special?"

She did not answer his smile. For a moment he thought she might be frightened by the milling crowd, although the hooligans were already being reduced to something like respectable behaviour by the imperturbable

Station Police. Using his elbows, he made his way towards her.

"If you're scared," he said, "you can always get aboard the Van here, until the worst of it's over!"

"Thank you," she answered, "it's kind of you, but—er—I guess I'm in a hurry. Good-bye!"

She turned away leaving him staring. Where was the impetuous smiling girl of the visit to Alexandra Palace? This Gloria seemed like another person—pale, nervous, uncertain of herself. Her voice had a hard anxious edge to it; even her clothes seemed shabby and lacking in *chic* . . .

But Bruce had no time for further speculation. Hasluck and Susan had to be petted and congratulated; the Van had to be visited and A.P. telephoned for news of results. Probably Gloria was embarrassed at meeting him after the scene at 'Five Cedars.' Possibly she had simply not wished to be seen meeting the boat-train. . . .

. . . . .

At two o'clock the following morning Winthrop Bruce was about to crawl into bed, with the comforting certainty that one day's work had been well and truly done. The 'late evenings' had given approving notices to the 'Tele-

vised Arrival of a Boat-Train,' so that there was very little for him to worry about until the nervous moment at breakfast next morning when he would stretch out his hand for the *Wire* and read Mr. Northcote's opinion of his afternoon's outing. He was just reaching for the light-switch when the telephone rang.

He picked up the receiver. Probably the new Director-General who had a way of getting his best ideas during patches of insomnia! "Hello—yes?"

Through the faint humming on the line came, surprisingly, the throb and whine of a dance band, then a woman's voice. "Gloria van Zuyl speaking . . ."

"I—er—did you say——?"

"Gloria van Zuyl. Mr. Bruce, I've changed my mind—I'll come and be televised if you still want me to."

"You mean that?"

"I surely do. I must get off the line now—I just slipped out to call you. You'll let me know about dates?"

"Of course," said Bruce, "but——!"

There was a distant click and the line went dead.

Chapter IV

Lay-out of 'Picture Parade'

Count Benito Ferrari was chatting casually with Junie, the famous hat-check girl at the 'Nirvana'—and at the same time watching the telephone-booth in the corner by the door that led out into Grosvenor Mews. Everyone in London knew Junie—though probably no one but herself and the Labour Exchange had ever heard her surname. A massive amiable blonde with a past in the chorus, she had an uncanny memory for hats and faces, a flow of Cockney wit, and quite a neat way with young men who stayed too late, drank too much champagne and then wanted to burn down the night club! The door of the telephone-booth opened . . . and Gloria came out. Ferrari broke off in the middle of his conversation and headed off his wife as she made her way back towards the dance-floor.

"I hope you didn't wake him!" he said pleasantly.

"Wake whom?" She looked tired and there was a note of defiance in her voice.

"Mr. David Calthrop!" The Count was still smiling, though the tone in which he

spoke the name was cold and scornful.

"If you must know," Gloria answered, "I was calling Mr. Bruce!"

"Ah, yes, your new Television friend . . . and what had you got to talk to Mr. Bruce about at two o'clock in the morning?"

"Does it matter?"

The smile left his face. "It matters," he said in a low voice, "that you leave your guests, that you say something to me about the cloak-room . . . and that I find you telephoning!"

The girl's eyes hardened. "If you keep up this spying act of yours, Benito, I won't answer for the consequences. I guess I've taken very nearly all I can stand from you!"

She moved towards the music, but Ferrari caught her by the wrist. "You haven't answered my question!" he said smoothly. "Why were you calling Bruce? He didn't strike me as a specially *attractive* man!"

"I called him," Gloria answered, "to tell him that if he still wanted to televise me in one of his programmes, I'd play! D'you object to that, Benito?"

"Certainly not," he said. "It sounds a most interesting idea . . . and I shall be one of your admiring audience, my dear!"

"You should approve," she added, echoing bitterly the thought which Winthrop Bruce had jokingly put into her head that afternoon. "After all, you'll only have to switch on your

Television set to be quite certain for once where I am!"

"Exactly! Now shall we go back and dance?"

As the two of them disappeared into the dimly-lit, smoky oblong room where the negro proprietress was rendering 'All this—and Heaven, too!' in the luscious, sulky voice which drew crowds every night to the 'Nirvana,' the girl in the cloakroom dropped her evening paper and went quickly across to the telephone. She dialled a number. It was a number Junie often called; the possession of it brought her in quite a few guineas every week!

• • • • •

GLORIA VAN ZUYL FOR TELEVISION 'PICTURE PARADE' SENSATION

These were the headlines which greeted the eye of Mr. Winthrop Bruce at breakfast-time next morning. The newspaper was the *Wire*: the column that presided over by Mr. Dudley Northcote. Had the fellow got second-sight? Why, the London edition of the *Wire* went to press at two-thirty . . . and it had been already two o'clock when Gloria telephoned her acceptance! None of the other papers had it, so it could not have been released by an agency. Bruce gave vent to a groan of

anguish which brought his cocker spaniel leaping from the hearth-rug, and reached for the telephone. In a moment he was engaged in a heated conversation with Jim Churchman.

When his chief had finished with him—it took quite a time and developed into something approaching a row—Churchman got Northcote on the line.

"What's the fuss?" asked the journalist. "'Winnie' sore that I didn't give a big boost to that boat-train outing of his?"

Jim Churchman thought that that was probably true, but he didn't say so. "No, we just want to know where the devil you picked up that story about van Zuyl and 'Picture Parade'!"

"Ah," said Northcote, "that's a mystery. However, my dear James, since you are a pleasant-mannered young Civil Servant whom I should like to see get on, I'll tell you this much: the Countess Ferrari was dancing at the 'Nirvana' last night; she told her husband that she had changed her mind about being televised, that she'd called up 'Winnie' and accepted. 'Picture Parade' was just a guess of mine—it seemed the obvious programme for her—and I added 'next Monday' just to make you Bright Boys get a move on!"

"Thank you!" said Churchman bitterly. "Your kindness is the one bright spot in an

otherwise arid and disappointing existence!"

Stephen Crawford's office was in a condition only to be described as a flat spin. 'Office' was a strictly courtesy term—it was little more than a large-sized cubicle tucked away on the fourth floor of the north-eastern tower of Alexandra Palace, with overhead lighting and the walls panelled with photographs of the celebrities who had appeared at various times in 'Picture Parade.'

Miss Kyle, Crawford's secretary, a pleasant bun-faced little girl with plaits of fair hair coiled over her ears, was typing like a demon. Miss Fellowes, who had come up from the third floor with Winthrop Bruce's instructions, was watching her with an air of faint superiority. Maclean, the very Scottish Productions Manager, who liked to be called (and in fact was) the linchpin of Television Studio Organization, and Steve Crawford himself were seated side by side on the latter's desk, poring over a plan of Studio B. Behind them a grave-faced young man with a beard and thick glasses was trying to find space on the said desk on which to set up a model of the 'set' which in his opinion would serve best as a background for the beauty of Gloria van Zuyl . . . to say nothing of the 'Peacock Throne.'

"You're sure she's going to wear the ruby, Miss Fellowes?"

"I spoke to the Countess myself, Mr. Crawford, and she is!"

Steve grinned delightedly. "It's a terrific stunt!" he said. "Two at a blow!"

"Lucky this is A.P., not B.H.," was Maclean's dour comment. "Otherwise we'd have so many police in the studio there wouldn't be room to set up a camera!"

The door opened and Jim Churchman came in.

"Hello, Gloom," said Crawford. "What's the matter now?"

"That damned story of Northcote's. It's killed the boat-train stuff . . . and 'Winnie's' chances of surprising us with the news about van Zuyl—which, knowing our 'Winnie,' you'll agree is pretty bad. Then there's the whole of Fleet Street on the line for the second time of asking. They're practically hinting that Northcote has a hold over me!"

"Well, what about us? The whole 'Picture Parade' lay-out to be rehashed—and only half an hour to do it in!"

Churchman sighed resignedly. "You've got your troubles, too," he said. "Come on, what's the dope?"

Crawford turned over a file and brandished a pencil with fine abandon.

"Well," he said, "I've had to scrap my troupe of seals! I didn't think the Fair Gloria would exactly relish a studio full of

herrings and whatnot. And I've put off Magda Bandes: film stars from Bohemia-Moravia are a drug on the market anyway . . . and they will try to talk about what the *Gestapo* has done to their little brothers!"

"I asked you," said the Press man patiently, "for the people you *had* got!"

"Sorry! Well, first of all there's the Great Minetti . . ."

"The illusionist?"

"That's the bloke. I saw him at the Palladium, and I tell you he's terrific . . . makes everything disappear . . . from a cup of cocoa to a crocodile!"

"Not bad. Go on!"

"Then there's Mamontova, the Russian ballet woman . . . just back from her tour of the Argentine. Basil here has fixed a swell background for her . . . dances out of 'Tricorne'!"

The young man with the beard smiled deprecatingly, and went on working out camera-angles on his model with a specially designed protractor.

"Pat O'Hara, the Irish baritone," continued Crawford.

"Ye gods!" groaned Churchman. "All lakes and colleens and shillelaghs and shamrocks and mothers of his . . .!"

"And they'll eat it!" put in Miss Fellowes.

Jim regarded her forbiddingly. "Is 'Win-

nie' making you a cynic, Miss Fellowes?" he inquired.

Crawford's secretary giggled. Miss Fellowes bridled, and went out.

"That girl," said Churchman, "is getting a bit too big for her number-five shoes! Carry on, Steve!"

"Bunkum and Tosh, the cross-talk act; and, to top up with, after we've had Gloria and her ruby, a Mannequin Parade introduced by Watson Howe—you know him, the Willowy Wonder from Bruton Street!"

"That'll do me," said Jim, scribbling notes on his pad. "But no more changes, my lad—unless you're looking for sudden death!"

"Susan and Bill Hasluck handling as usual," added Crawford. "Have you got that running-order out yet, Miss Kyle, with all the usual copies? Don't forget the one to Broadcasting House this time!"

Miss Kyle flushed and typed more furiously than ever. And Jim Churchman felt that the comparatively calm atmosphere of the Make-up Room would make an agreeable change. He accordingly proceeded thither. He was not pleased to find, first, that Jo Easton was not alone; and secondly, that she and her chief were deep in an enormously professional discussion concerning make-up and Gloria van Zuyl, from which they were by no means to be diverted. . . .

On that Monday evening which was to see the production of 'Picture Parade (135th Edition),' Winthrop Bruce accepted an invitation from David Calthrop to drink a glass of sherry at the Guards Club. He hadn't much wanted to go—it meant Alexandra Palace to Brook Street and back in the short space of an hour —but something in Calthrop's voice over the telephone had decided him.

The little bar of the Club was empty, except for the barman, drowsing over to-morrow's racing form. 'Just as well,' thought Bruce. After their telephone conversation he had been prepared to find his host in a somewhat emotional state of mind . . . but he had not bargained for the Calthrop who stood waiting for him in the hall when he arrived. His friend seemed to have aged since that visit to Alexandra Palace; his hands were unsteady and there were dark circles under his eyes; it was plain that he had been drinking . . . and as they sat together in the corner of the bar his words sluiced out like a cataract.

"I know I shouldn't talk about it—not even to you—but you've seen her, 'Winnie,' and you've seen Ferrari! Something's got to be done about it! I know I've no right—except that I'm crazily in love with her, of course. But she won't do anything herself . . . she seems to be hypnotised by the swine! It's always been pretty beastly, but now that he's

started to lay his hands on her, I won't stand for it . . . I can't!"

Bruce looked at Calthrop over the rim of his glass. "I don't want to seem unsympathetic," he said, slowly, "but what *can* you do? After all, she did marry him . . ."

"Out of the schoolroom!"

"Nowadays they know most things in the schoolroom," murmured the B.B.C. man, "or so I'm told!"

"I'm going to have a showdown with Ferrari!" said Calthrop suddenly. "And I'm going to have it to-night!"

"To-night?"

"Yes, while Glory's up at your show. He's going to watch her on that patent Television screen-thing of his—so I'm certain to get him alone for once. That's why I asked you to come over this evening. I want you to do something for me!"

"Such as——?"

"I want you to keep Glory at Alexandra Palace for a bit after the show's over. Don't let her leave at once; talk to her or show her something—anything you like—only keep her away from 'Five Cedars' for as long as you can!"

Bruce shrugged his shoulders and finished his sherry.

"I'll do what I can," he said. "But, if you take my advice, you'll keep off the grass. I

repeat, she did marry him . . . and she's got plenty of will of her own, unless I'm very much mistaken!" He got to his feet. "Sorry, but I've got to bolt now!"

Calthrop's lips tightened as he showed his guest to the door.

"I may have no case," he said, "but I do happen to love Glory . . . and now that that swine's started knocking her about, I'll settle things with him—even if it costs me every cent I've got, and my commission into the bargain!"

Bruce shook hands and swung himself into his car. It hardly seemed worth while to mention to the distraught young man who stood in the doorway of the Club that if he insisted on 'settling things' with Count Benito Ferrari, he might be imperilling not only his income and his career but his life into the bargain!

CHAPTER V

Sudden Death

TELEVISION HAD CRASHED THE front pages again; the 'evenings' devoted columns to 'Picture Parade,' to Gloria van Zuyl, her fortune, her ruby, even her husband, splashing generously the pictures which Jim Churchman had had taken on the occasion of Gloria's original visit to Alexandra Palace. Twenty million dollars, topped by the 'Peacock Throne' and its dangerous history, made a story to which every typist, homeward bound by Underground, turned with fascinated interest. Owners of Television sets found themselves the object of 'casual' visits from friends they had not seen for years; public-houses which boasted a screen did a roaring trade; and one enterprising news-theatre near to Marble Arch broke its own record for standing room.

Jim Churchman had done his work well . . . and it could safely be said that as nine o'clock came round, every Television receiver in the country was adjusted to Alexandra Palace.

ONE MILLION VIEWERS TO-NIGHT! screamed the *Evening Wire* . . . and com-

pared the appearance of Gloria van Zuyl with such Television milestones as the Coronation, the Boat Race, and the first broadcast of a complete Opera from Covent Garden. The 'Peacock Throne' figured largely in every newspaper . . . and many a viewer, no doubt, as he tuned-in his set, wondered whether Gloria van Zuyl was wise to wear that perilous treasure in front of the camera, whether perhaps the ruby which had brought disaster to so many might not add another chapter to its history to-night!

Among the million viewers ("Pretty generous estimate!" said Churchman, "but it'll do!") was Julian Caird. The Drama Director of the B.B.C., whose title to fame rested on his obstinate championship of Shakespeare and the fact that, three years before, he had helped to solve the Broadcasting House murder mystery, had been holding something of a watching brief as far as Television was concerned. The 'junior service,' which had begun as something of a Cinderella, was growing up with astonishing rapidity and showing a most un-Cinderella-like disinclination to leave the ball at midnight. Television opera and drama were scooping the headlines of the radio columns and the name of Winthrop Bruce loomed larger in the public-eye than that of Julian Caird, Max Wycherley, and the rest of the departmental chiefs at Portland Place.

Professional interest told Caird that Television was vitally important; professional jealousy sometimes made him wish it at the bottom of the sea. But of the two emotions the former had triumphed . . . and there were few people in England who watched their Television screens with such concentration and questioning as Caird.

On this particular evening he had invited an old friend to dine at his Long Acre flat. It was the anniversary of the Budapest Opera House Crime. Max Wycherley was away in the South of France, taking what he called a holiday (which consisted of sitting indoors on blazing afternoons, writing lyrics for a new musical comedy!), but Inspector Simon Spears of the C.I.D. was in London . . . and Caird could never resist an excuse for any sort of celebration!

"Ever seen any Television, Simon?" asked Caird, as he collected the brandy and a box of cigars from the sideboard.

Spears only grunted. He had had a tough day at the Yard.

"I've got a treat for you to-night," Caird went on. "Gloria van Zuyl and that ruby of hers . . . 'Picture Parade'!"

Again Spears did not reply and, looking up, Caird was surprised to see that his guest had flushed brick-red and was making remarkable

frog-like noises in his throat. "What on earth's the matter, Simon?"

"Nothing!" replied the Scotland Yard man, "except that Miss Gloria van Zuyl and all that is hers gives me a pain in the neck!"

"You've had trouble with her, too?"

"Trouble? That damned ruby of hers is worth all of £30,000 and the insurance company didn't like the idea of her carrying it round Alexandra Palace at dead of night without someone keeping an eye on it. They got at the Assistant-Commissioner this morning and I had to ring up the lady and suggest that we might send a few boys from the Hendon College brigade—white ties and all that—to look after it!"

"And it didn't go too well?"

"I got my head well and truly bitten off!" replied Spears disgustedly. "The Countess was grateful, but when she wanted police protection she would ask for it! She came from the States, where they knew something about crime. She would be glad if the District Attorney—if that was the guy's right name—would mind his own business!"

"What ho!" observed Caird. "Smart girl grows up!"

"So now you know why I don't want to look at her!" said Spears. "I suggest we talk about Budapest and go on to the Café Royal!"

The number of times Spears was to regret

that innocent suggestion does not bear thinking of . . . !

* * * * *

Here follows an extract from the private diary of Miss Josephine Easton:

Monday.

Picture Parade, 135th Edition. Never saw A.P. in quite such a flat spin, not even in the earliest days. Had hoped to get away to eat in Town before the show but Maggie (*Jo's chief and idol*) wouldn't go, so chewed the usual bun and coffee with her in the Canteen. The odious Northcote tried to horn in on us. Luckily Maggie can't stand him any more than I can. There was a mass of newspapermen there so he had no excuse for hanging around. Wonder if it's true, as Jim Churchman says, that N. is on the edge of a money smash. I don't want most people to lose their jobs but he's the one exception!

Pretty good programme taken all round. Didn't see much of it, being assigned to Gloria van Z., as I'd met her on her first visit. Was rather disappointed in her. She seemed terribly nervous—this time not a bit friendly—in fact rather high-hat. Don't suppose things were helped by Jim bringing in a photographer to take her in the process of making-up. And she insisted on finishing her lips

herself, which was silly of her. Funny I didn't notice before that her hair was touched-up, but she had a hat on then.

Wonderful set-up by Basil in Studio B. Three sets—usual Music Hall palace background for the conjurer man who was amazing and gave me the creeps, swallowing lighted cigars and pushing daggers through the backs of his hands. Mamontova had a Bakstish setting for her dances. That woman's a bitch. Maggie looked after her, praise be; she threw temperaments all over the Make-up Room, and tried to row Maclean about money just before going on! Got as much change as you might expect (I rather like Scots sometimes). Finally a Pekin temple set for van Zuyl and the ruby. She played up to that all right—came with a fantastically gorgeous kimono thing to change into—all greens and golds and peacock blue (oh, to be a Poor Little Rich Girl!). Must have been worth a fortune in itself, to say nothing of a headdress of twisted gold—and the ruby!

Think I did a swell job on her make-up, though that mouth looked a bit gummy. Susan interviewed, but didn't seem to be able to get much pep out of Gloria, which was queer when you think how she swept us all off our feet that first visit. However, when you're worth twenty million dollars, I guess it doesn't matter much what you do!

More trouble with Northcote. He had the nerve to bust into the Make-up Room while G. was changing after the show; had been in there five minutes when Mac and I caught him, after which he went out neatly on his ear (again, thank God for Scots!). G. didn't seem to care about anything much except getting away quickly. I tidied up and just caught the last B.B.C. 'bus. Went into Town with Steve who was well up in the air, having had a 'phone call from the D.G. congratulating him on the show. Saw 'Winnie' in the hall as we left—looking *most* peculiar! Wondered if anything had gone wrong or if he'd been celebrating; he looked as if he was walking in his sleep. Maybe just simple reaction. He doesn't have much chance to soft-pedal, poor brute. So home and to bed. Jim rang me just as I was dropping off. Bla—I mean, *bless* him!

. . . . .

As 'Picture Parade' faded out on the screen in his office, Winthrop Bruce stifled a bad-tempered yawn and lit a cigarette. It had been a tiresome evening. To begin with, David Calthrop had kept him in Brook Street longer than he had intended, so that he had only got back to Alexandra Palace just in time to swallow a sandwich before the transmission was due.

The programme had been a good one on the whole; Hasluck was in great form; Susan

Campbell had handled the star of the evening with extreme tact, almost managing to cover up Gloria van Zuyl's obvious nervousness; that tiresome Slav, Mamontova, was certainly a great *ballerina*; O'Hara's sobbing baritone must surely have drawn tears from every inhibited virgin in the three kingdoms . . . and Minetti had lived up to his reputation, achieving an astonishing climax in which he apparently swallowed a complete bowl of goldfish on to whose surface burning brandy had been poured (the trick had drawn such an obviously unrehearsed "Good Lord!" from Bill Hasluck that everyone in the studio had laughed).

Then there had been more trouble with Northcote . . . Maclean ringing up to complain that he would not keep away from the floor during transmission. He would have to talk to the Public Relations man at Broadcasting House about Northcote—and would probably be told, as usual, that "we rather want to keep in with the *Wire* at the moment, old man—and Northcote's rather a pet of His Lordship's!"

Bruce sighed and shook his head. The life of a Television Director was no bed of roses; there were moments when he thought back regretfully to that quiet corner office at Broadcasting House from which he had dreamily directed occasional performances of Opera.

Various people were said to want his job. Well, let them have it!

He glanced at the scratch-pad on his desk. Work for to-morrow . . . a triangle play to be cut and censored to make it fit for national consumption . . . the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture to be interviewed regarding some Television publicity for the Turnip Marketing Board . . . a finance meeting at B.H. . . . must talk to Steve about that ruby. . . .

Steve should have known better than to have allowed the 'Peacock Throne' into the programme. It had made a good Press story, of course, and would thrill the hearts of a number of silly young ladies in Peckham, but there was a limit to sensationalism. Suppose someone had stolen the damned thing! He'd told Maclean to keep an eye on it, but from all accounts Gloria van Zuyl had rather rudely refused the offer of police surveillance.

He stubbed out his cigarette, turned out the lights and left the room, remembering his half-promise to Calthrop, to keep Gloria talking after the programme. This Calthrop-van Zuyl *affaire* was probably just a lot of neurotic nonsense, anyway. He only hoped that the star-crossed lover had gone carefully in his interview with the Count!

As he went along the passage, Dudley Northcote brushed hurriedly past him. Bruce was

sorely tempted to stop him and have their row there and now, but he didn't want to miss Gloria; quite apart from Calthrop, it would be only polite to thank her and say good-night. He was lifting his hand to knock at the door of Number 1 Dressing Room when it opened suddenly in his face. Gloria stood there in the doorway. Her face was very white . . . one hand was raised to her throat. Behind her Bruce had an unattractive view of the *ballerina* Mamontova, her face covered with grease.

"Don't you think, Countess, that a cup of coffee or a drink—" Bruce began.

He was given no opportunity to finish the sentence. The girl stammered some incoherent words, then literally pushed him to one side and ran down the passage.

"Poor girl!" said Mamontova with a shrug. "She seems like so many amateurs, very nervous!"

But Bruce didn't wait. Gloria's words had been almost inaudible, but those few which he had heard sent him racing down the passage in pursuit. "Peacock Throne . . . awful thing that ever happened!"

There was no sign of her in the entrance hall.

"Countess Ferrari, sir?" said the Commissionaire at the reception desk. "Just gone out to her car."

But Bruce was too late; as he came out on to the steps and faced the great sea of lights below him, two cars, both driven at a furious pace, swung away down the long curved driveway that girdles Alexandra Palace and vanished Londonwards. One of them he recognized as the grey Bentley.

Hurrying back indoors, with the idea of questioning Mamontova as to exactly what had happened, he found the Commissionaire busy with the telephone. "Would you take this call, sir?"

"What call?"

"It's for the Countess, sir. I told them that she'd left, but the man seems very agitated. He says he must speak to someone!"

Bruce picked up the telephone.

"Winthrop Bruce speaking. You want the Countess Ferrari? She's just left here!"

"This is Bastin, Mr. Bruce—Count Ferrari's butler. I must speak to the Countess, sir. Something dreadful has happened!"

"*What's* happened?" Bruce rapped back irritably. He had had almost enough for one evening.

"The Count, sir—he's been shot dead!"

"Hell's bells!" said Winthrop Bruce—and, leaving the Commissionaire gasping at his desk, ran down the steps to his waiting car.

CHAPTER VI

Spears Takes Charge

JULIAN CAIRD LOOKED IMPATIENTLY at his watch, ordered a final brandy, and glanced, through the smoke-haze of the Café Royal, towards the door through which Simon Spears had been called to the telephone. Broadcasting, he reflected, might be a dogs-body job at times but at least it left one with an occasional evening to oneself, without being pursued from 'phone-number to 'phone-number by one's superiors. The Romance of Scotland Yard! No wonder genuine police officers disliked the authors of detective stories!

Suddenly he saw Spears threading his way through the overcrowded tables and *banquettes.* On the Inspector's face was that purposeful expression which Caird remembered only too well.

"Well, Simon—? Job of work?"

Spears nodded as he gulped down his brandy and reached for his hat. "Yes—and where do you think?"

"Someone kidnapped the Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"Not this time, but the Night Officer at the

Yard has had a call from Count Ferrari's house, out Hampstead way. He's married to the van Zuyl girl who slapped me down about her jewellery this morning!"

"I know the place—'Five Cedars.'"

"That's it. Apparently the butler called the Yard . . . as jittery as hell. Somebody's been shooting off a gun there—and Ferrari may be dead!"

"Good Lord!" said Caird, as he paid the bill.

"Yes, there'll be the Countess to cope with, too. Care to come with me? It'll be an all-night job, I warn you . . . but I seem to remember from Budapest that you can take late hours!"

Caird eagerly accepted. One day Spears would get into trouble for carting interested amateurs around with him, but in the meantime . . . They went out into Regent Street. As they emerged from the swing-doors, a police car slid unobtrusively alongside the pavement. The car contained, apart from its driver, Detective-Sergeant Ring and a little man with a bowler hat and a Chaplin moustache who had a remarkable and exhaustive acquaintance with finger-prints and their owners.

"Hampstead!" said Spears. "Better go by Regent's Park and Fitzjohn's Avenue this time of night!" and the car headed northward, making rings round the traffic.

The door of 'Five Cedars' was opened by a cherubic constable of the Hampstead Division.

"Mr. Spears? You'll find everybody in the drawing-room, sir."

He led them across the hall and opened the drawing-room door with an air that Bastin himself could not have bettered.

Grouped, a little awkwardly, in the centre of the long white room were four men: Winthrop Bruce, who had arrived about two minutes earlier; the Divisional Surgeon, lugubrious and lantern-jawed; a police photographer, fidgeting with his cameras; and a stout, dapper gentleman in full evening dress, complete with gardenia and eyeglass, who introduced himself as Sir Everard Miles of Wimpole Street, specialist in nervous diseases.

"Well—?" snapped Spears. "What's it all about? Who's in charge?"

The Divisional Surgeon coughed. "Sergeant Halliday . . . Hampstead," he said.

"Well, where is he?"

"Upstairs."

"Why?"

Sir Everard Miles took out his cigar-case. "Perhaps I might explain the situation," he said coolly. "Count Ferrari has been shot and killed. The tragedy took place in the bedroom of the Countess's grandfather, Mr. Abraham van Zuyl. Mr. van Zuyl has been

an invalid for some years. Since he took up his residence in this country he has been under the professional care of myself, and of Doctor William Lethbridge. As you may imagine, what has taken place has been a very severe shock to the old gentleman. Doctor Lethbridge and a nurse are with him now. I propose to join them after the preliminary examination."

Sir Everard smiled pleasantly as he clipped his cigar. He evidently liked the sound of his own voice and was enjoying the present situation to the full.

But Spears was not impressed. "I asked," he said coldly, "where the Sergeant in charge of this case was, and what he was doing!"

Sir Everard smiled through a wreath of cigar-smoke. "Seeing that nothing is touched or moved until you got here, Inspector! Bastin, the butler, who telephoned the first news of the killing——"

"Killing?" Spears interrupted sharply.

"I should have chosen my words more carefully," said the specialist. "Bastin is with the Sergeant, in the room with the body of the Count."

Spears glared momentarily, then sat down. Caird followed his example, and nodded awkwardly to Bruce.

"Fancy finding you here!" he murmured.

"I got the news out at A.P.," said Bruce.

"The message was for the Countess. She'd just left, so I chased after her in my car . . ."

"And she's not back yet," said Spears. "That's odd!"

There was a little pause. "Come along," he added, turning to the Divisional Surgeon, "tell me what you know, while we're waiting."

The lantern-jawed man consulted some notes scribbled in the margin of his evening paper. "The Hampstead Police were called from this house by the butler Bastin at 9.37. Sergeant Halliday told him to get through to the Yard with his story and brought us over here at once by car. It appears from Bastin's statement that the Count and his wife dined together at 7.15. Dinner was early because the Countess was going to Alexandra Palace to appear in a Television programme."

"That's right!" murmured Winthrop Bruce.

"At 8.15 the Countess left the house, driving herself in her grey Bentley car . . ."

"And she arrived at Alexandra Palace in that same car round about 8.30!" Bruce added.

"I'll take your statement later, Mr. Bruce!" said Spears quellingly. "Go on, Mallam!"

"At about 8.35," proceeded the Divisional Surgeon, "a Mr. David Calthrop called to see Count Ferrari . . ."

"The devil he did!" muttered Bruce under his breath.

"Bastin admitted him to this room, where the Count joined him."

"Who is Calthrop?" interrupted Spears. There was a silence, until Winthrop Bruce, with the shy air of a schoolboy asking permission to leave the room, ventured an explanation. "David Calthrop . . . Welsh Guards . . . a friend of mine and Countess Ferrari's!"

"Hm!" said Spears. "Go on!"

"The Count first of all tuned in the Television set there. Then he dismissed Bastin, telling him that he wished on no account to be disturbed until after the programme in which his wife was appearing. While Bastin was in the room, Mr. Calthrop and the Count said nothing, except for the Count offering his guest a drink and Calthrop refusing. After he left the room, though, Bastin says that he heard high words exchanged between the two men, but they were indistinguishable through the closed door. He can't say when Mr. Calthrop left the house. He himself did not let him out. At 9.24 Bastin, who was then in the servants' quarters, heard what at first he believed to be a car back-firing in the drive. A few minutes later the bell that was always beside Mr. van Zuyl's bed was violently rung and continued ringing. Bastin and Mr. van

Zuyl's personal valet hurried to the room. I should add, Spears, that Mr. van Zuyl has a small suite to himself, completely apart from the rest of the house. This set of three rooms —bedroom, bathroom and sun-trap—is cut off by a heavy double-door. Sir Everard tells me that Mr. van Zuyl, as a permanent invalid, was very sensitive that his affliction should not in any way interfere with the normal life of the rest of the household."

"A great character . . . a most exceptional old man," said Sir Everard, nodding gravely.

"In Mr. van Zuyl's bedroom," continued Mallam, "the two servants found the body of Count Ferrari, lying on the floor. He had been shot through the chest and was quite dead. A small automatic pistol lay beside the body on a white fur rug. The pistol, Bastin states, belonged to the Count. There had evidently, from the condition of the room, been a considerable struggle. Mr. van Zuyl lay collapsed in the bed, having apparently fainted. Bastin promptly rang up the Countess, who had apparently just left the Television Studios, the police, Sir Everard and Doctor Lethbridge. So far, Spears, I have done nothing beyond assuring myself that the Count was dead."

"Doctor Mallam agreed with me," put in the specialist, "that our first care should be for Mr. van Zuyl—for a man of his age and

infirmity the struggle and the shooting must have been a grave shock! I was agreeable, though, to Sergeant Halliday remaining in the room, to keep an eye on things from your angle!"

'Oh, you were!' thought Spears, repressing a schoolboyish desire to push that fat cigar well and truly down that fat throat. "I think," he said shortly, "that I'll go upstairs now. Sir Everard and you, Mallam, had better come with me. You can stay here, Mr. Bruce—you and Julian can keep each other company. . . . And I'll send down for you when I'm ready for you!" he added to the police photographer and the finger-print expert.

. . . . . .

Simon Spears had seen sudden death in many circumstances—in fact, since his promotion to the ranks of the 'Big Five' he seemed almost to have lived with it—but he found himself quite unusually shaken as he stood on the threshold of Abraham van Zuyl's bedroom.

It was a huge, gloomy room, furnished in the fashion of the late and luxurious Victorians. At the moment the great four-poster bed was cut off from sight by two tall Japanese screens from behind which came a low murmur of voices. With a muttered apology

Sir Everard Miles left Spears and hurried to join his colleague and the nurse at the bedside of the millionaire.

Spears nodded curtly to Halliday. The Hampstead man looked the right kind—square-built, silent, with dark watchful eyes. "I've let them touch nothing, sir!" he said. "The room's just as Bastin found it!"

"So you're Bastin?" said Spears to the baldish, shaggy-browed individual who stood beside the screen, fidgeting nervously with his handkerchief.

"Yes, sir. This has been—a great shock to me, sir!"

"No doubt," replied Spears. "Better get out of here—we'll see you later. Oh, and by the way," he added, as the man headed for the door with obvious relief, "let me know as soon as the Countess Ferrari gets back!"

In front of the old-fashioned fireplace was a white bearskin rug; on the snowy surface of it lay the little .22 automatic pistol to which Mallam had referred. The body of Count Ferrari lay sprawled to the right of the rug; the dead man was face downwards, one arm twisted underneath him, the other flung out towards the white-panelled wainscoting. Immediately behind the body, to the right of the fireplace, stood a heavy dressing-table of Victorian design. It had been pushed slightly askew, and its battery of brushes, bottles and

silver trays had been flung all over the floor. A faint reek of powder was still perceptible in the airless room.

Treading carefully, Spears peered down at the body. "You're certain," he said curtly to Mallam, "that Mr. van Zuyl couldn't have left that bed?"

"Impossible, Spears. Sir Everard will confirm that!"

"Very well. Turn the body over!"

Mallam obeyed. The ensuing sight was not exactly a pretty one. Ferrari's lips were set in a twisted grin; his eyes were open in a strange, questioning stare; the pleated breast of his evening-dress shirt was marked with an ugly scarlet stain.

"Hello," said Spears suddenly, "what's that in his hand?"

Mallam forced the stiffened fingers open. A small glittering cylinder tinkled down on to the floor. Spears picked it up in his handkerchief.

"Lipstick . . . Guerlain Special. Now what the devil was he doing with that?"

"Scribbling, apparently," said the Divisional Surgeon—and pointed to the wainscoting, just above the dead man's outstretched hand. There, on the white paint, in wavering vermilion but quite distinct, were the letters *C A* . . .

Spears was thoughtful as he sealed the lip-

stick into an envelope, and scribbled a few notes on the back of another in his neat, almost microscopic handwriting. "Halliday!"

"Sir?"

"Get down to the 'phone . . . tell them to pick up Mr. David Calthrop. Ask Mr. Bruce downstairs where he's likely to be found. If Bruce doesn't know try the Guards Club, Brook Street. I want Calthrop here right away. It looks as though—!" Spears broke off and took a sudden quick step towards the door.

Framed in the doorway was the Countess Ferrari, Gloria van Zuyl. She was as pale as a ghost; her fair hair and the grey suit she wore showed traces of having been in the rain (Spears remembered that as he and Caird jumped from the police car, the first drops of a threatened shower had begun to fall). She seemed very young and oddly pathetic as she stood there, swaying a little on her feet.

"What is it?" she stammered. "What's happened? I don't understand."

In a moment Spears was at her side, steadying her. "I'm sorry, Countess," he said, "but there's been an—accident here—and I'm afraid that your husband is dead!"

"But how—what happened?" she repeated.

"We don't know—yet. It may only have been an accident. We shall hear the facts

soon, though—as soon as the doctors manage to bring your grandfather round!"

She clutched at his arm desperately; at the same moment Sir Everard Miles emerged from behind the screens, his fat face unusually solemn.

"Well," said Spears, "can I take Mr. van Zuyl's statement?" He felt Gloria's fingers bruising his wrist. Poor girl! what a situation to walk back into!

"I regret to have to tell you," said the specialist slowly, "that Mr. van Zuyl has had a paralytic stroke of the most serious kind. He is for the time being quite helpless . . . and it is extremely doubtful whether he will ever be able to speak again!"

With a little sigh Gloria van Zuyl let go of Spears' wrist and crumpled to the floor in a dead faint!

Chapter VII

Concerning Finger-prints

DUDLEY NORTHCOTE, ALONE FOR the moment in the long Reporters' Room at the *Wire,* was slapping out the last page of his story on the van Zuyl broadcast.

The well-known poise, the mask of sophistication, had vanished. Faced with ordeal-by-camera, the Twenty Million Dollar Girl was as nervous as any mill-hand who ever entered for an Amateur Talent Competition. Her white hands——

The telephone rang. He turned wearily from the typewriter.

"Hello?"

"Northcote?"

"Yeah!"

"Robertson here." 'Bobs' Robertson was the Night Editor.

"For God's sake, get off my tail!" Northcote rapped back. "I'll have my copy in before twelve!"

"You can scrap it!"

"Wha—at?"

"Bring your stuff in here—and I'll tell you!"

A minute later Northcote was in the Night Editor's room, where he found Robertson, a gloomy Scot, eating Petit Beurre biscuits and drinking tea of the consistency of black treacle.

"Take a look at that!" said Robertson, pushing a slip of agency tape across the table. Northcote skimmed through the paragraph which had been stuttered out by the ticker-machine—and gave vent to a suppressed whistle. It was the story of the shooting of Count Benito Ferrari.

"I've just canned the front page," put in the Night Editor, with the air of a mother guilty of strangling her youngest child. "Flannigan's on his way to Hampstead now; he'll cover the crime angle; you'd better tackle your stuff again—link it up with the killing—'While she posed in gold and rubies for the world to see, he was lying dead' and all that!" Scotsmen are supposed to lack a sense of humour, but Robertson in moments of crisis would occasionally break into a sardonic burlesque of his own paper's over-luscious style!

The telephone rang. The Night Editor reached for it. "Hello? . . . Here, Northcote, it's for you, from the Entrance. Some woman inquiring for you down there. You'll be in trouble if you don't leave the girls alone!"

"I can take care of myself!" said Northcote coldly. He took over the instrument.

"Who d'you say . . . Who? . . . No, tell her I'm not here. And make it positive, see? I'm not here now. I haven't been here the whole evening—and you're not expecting me to-night. . . . Got that straight? . . . Then get rid of her—and make sure she goes!"

He rang off and turned round. The Night Editor was shaking his large head gloomily. "Women and poker!" he said. "I can't think how you young fellows can afford it!"

But Northcote did not seem to hear the reproof. He was staring thoughtfully at the wall. "Bobs," he said suddenly, "how about letting me go to Amsterdam?"

"Amsterdam?" Robertson almost dropped his spectacles into his tea with surprise. "Now what would I want you to be doing in Amsterdam?"

"Checking up on that story of the ruby. You remember the stuff we ran on the 'Peacock Throne' . . . stolen from Pekin . . . killed everyone who had to do with it?"

The Night Editor looked doubtful. "That was all a lot of hooey!" he said.

"Maybe, but it's the story. Remember the Mummy Case they brought over to the British Museum; it wrecked the ship it travelled in, killed the workmen who moved it. There was an article on it in one of the magazines only the other day . . . and that was all thirty years ago. Fatal Rubies, Haunted Mummy

Cases—it's a good line. There might be something in it, too; after all, the Ferraris only bought the ruby ten days ago and here's the Count lying dead in Hampstead. The last owner, van Zeeland, died curiously, too, in Amsterdam. Let me hunt up the facts on that —interview the widow—get her sympathy for Gloria van Zuyl . . . !"

"Hm!" admitted the Scotsman, "it might do. Watson can take over your radio stuff. When'll you leave?"

"First K.L.M. plane to-morrow!"

"Okay. But remember this is a job, not a holiday. You be back here in two days—and none of those £300 chits for expenses!"

"I'll take trams and live at the Y.M.C.A.," replied Northcote with a grin and was just about to leave the room when the telephone rang for the second time.

"You again!" said Robertson, handing over the receiver. "And another woman. It sounds as though she were playing the saxophone!"

"Hello?"

"That you, Mr. Northcote?" asked the voice of Junie, the hat-check girl at the Nirvana Club.

"Yes. Go ahead!"

"We've had the police here just now."

"Raid?"

"No, there wasn't any fuss. They just wanted to see Mr. Calthrop."

"David Calthrop?"

"That's right. I had him fetched out into the foyer. They talked to him and he went away with them in a car."

"Anyone with him?"

"No, he was alone—not changed—and drinking rather a lot!"

"Thanks, Junie, thanks. I'm off abroad to-morrow. I'll drop over and see you when I get back. So long, kid!"

Northcote put down the 'phone and turned to his Night Editor. "Know what that was?" he asked.

"Another of your Scarlet Women?"

"No, it was my good-bye present to you. Scotland Yard have just been to the Nirvana Club and picked up Mr. David Calthrop of His Majesty's Welsh Guards!"

"And who's Mr. David Calthrop?"

"Escort and admirer of the Countess Ferrari . . . and possibly the murderer of the Count!"

"My wor-r-rd!" Robertson almost jumped out of his chair . . . and for the first time that evening Dudley Northcote almost smiled. He enjoyed putting one over on the imperturbable 'Bobs'!

. . . . .

"And I've a damned good mind to have you

arrested for it!" finished Inspector Spears. He had been just too late to prevent Bastin, the Ferraris' unpleasant butler, from telephoning the News Agency with the story of the crime at 'Five Cedars.'

"Y-yes, sir. I'm s-sorry, sir," the man quavered, and with a scared look vanished from the room.

"Fat swine!" commented Spears. "For a couple of guineas he'd put every Press man in London on to us and mess up this case before it's even started!"

"He makes damned good coffee, though," said Julian Caird. "Have a cup, Simon. It'll help!"

Spears, Caird and Winthrop Bruce were alone in the long white drawing-room. The two medical men and the nurse were with Abraham van Zuyl. Sergeants Ring and Halliday, with the police photographer and the finger-print expert, were engaged on detailed routine work in the room upstairs. Gloria van Zuyl, in a state of complete collapse, had been carried to bed and was being looked after by her personal maid. "We won't get anything out of her to-night," Spears said as he sipped his coffee. "So I'd be glad, Mr. Bruce, if you'd give me your story of her movements at the Television Studios to-night!"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you anything of any special importance, Mr. Spears!"

"I'll be the judge of that. Just go right ahead and tell me anything you're certain of—with times!"

Winthrop Bruce unfolded a roneo-ed document headed:

RUNNING ORDER ISSUED BY TELEVISION PRODUCTIONS MANAGER
MONDAY 25 APRIL

This was the daily bulletin issued by Maclean, containing detailed instructions for the running of the programmes—timings, the wording of announcements, instructions to producers and engineers, and so on. Bruce was seldom without it.

"As far as the programme is concerned," he said, "you'll get it all from this. It gives the timing of each item in 'Picture Parade,' and it's probably pretty accurate, though Crawford did over-run his time a little and the show must have ended around 9.42, instead of 9.40 as scheduled!"

Spears glanced rapidly at the paper, then slipped it into his pocket.

"I'll keep this, if you don't mind . . . So the Countess was actually televising between 9.17 and 9.25?"

"Yes. That's the star position—centre of the programme."

"And Bastin heard the shot upstairs at 9.24—while she was still broadcasting!" said

Spears thoughtfully. "Well, that seems to settle the Countess—though we'll have to check up on the reasons why she was so late in getting home!"

"I think I might be able to help there," put in Bruce. "When I went downstairs to see her in the Make-up Room after the programme, she was in a great state of agitation. She had been annoyed by a newspaperman called Northcote, who had followed her into the room for an interview. I tried to speak to her but she said something about the 'Peacock Throne'—that's the ruby she wore for the show—and pushed past me along the corridor. By the time I'd followed her to the front entrance she'd got into her car and was half-way down the drive. Then I had the 'phone call from Bastin and chased after her. I didn't see the Bentley on the road—and when I got here, of course, she hadn't arrived!"

Spears looked up from his notes. "You don't remember exactly *what* she said about the ruby?"

"I'm not quite sure but it was something like 'Peacock Throne—the most awful thing that could have happened!'"

"What do you suppose she meant?"

"I haven't the least idea—unless she was referring to Northcote's behaviour. He'd been very keen on writing up the ruby ever since the first time he met her!"

"I'll have a word with Master Northcote," said Spears. "He sounds rather an unpleasant character!"

"And *is*!" Bruce chimed in meaningly.

"Where do you suppose the ruby is now?"

"Probably in her hand-bag; it was the other day, when she showed it to us."

"No wonder the insurance people were in a panic," remarked Spears — and abruptly changed the subject. "Now, Mr. Bruce, tell me something about this Mr. Calthrop. I believe it was he who introduced you to the Countess?"

"He brought her to Alexandra Palace," Bruce replied cautiously.

"And knows her very well?"

"Yes, they are friends."

"Only—friends?"

Bruce jumped up. "Damn it all, Inspector, I won't be put through the hoop like this. If you want to know about Calthrop's private affairs, you'd better ask him yourself . . . there he is!"

The door had in fact just opened and David Calthrop had preceded Sergeant Ring into the room. Spears turned to him.

"You know why you're here, Mr. Calthrop?"

"I know that Count Ferrari is dead," said Calthrop, "which in my opinion is a damned sound thing! ('The fool!' thought Winthrop Bruce. 'The crazy fool!'). I suppose you

want to know what I was doing here to-night —that is, if you knew that I *was* here?"

"I did," said Spears quietly.

Calthrop laughed. "Thank you, 'Winnie,' for your charming gesture, but I assure you that it wasn't necessary. I've got nothing to hide, Inspector. I did come here to have a showdown with Ferrari. I came to-night because Countess Ferrari was going to be away. I have a great regard for the Countess . . . and he was making her very unhappy. I arrived here not long before nine o'clock. I saw Ferrari in this room."

"And what happened?"

"I warned him that he'd better leave her alone—or take the consequences!"

"You realize," said Spears, "that you're admitting a good deal, that——"

"That everything I say will be taken down," Calthrop interrupted, "and may be used as evidence against me? Certainly! Bruce here and the barman at my club will tell you that I'd made up my mind to come here and tell Ferrari that . . . and I did tell it him, too. We were exchanging a few extremely impolite words, when the Television show started and we dropped quarrelling to watch it."

"How long did you watch the broadcast?"

"Till Glory—the Countess, that is—started on her interview. We watched her for a short while—about a minute I suppose it was—then

Ferrari suddenly said something in Italian (it sounded like a swear-word, though I don't understand the language myself) and dashed out of the room."

"Did you follow him?"

"No. I hung on where I was for a few minutes more. Then nothing happened and there was no sign of him coming back, so I let myself out through the French windows there and walked away."

"You admit," said Spears slowly, "that you are fond of the Countess—and yet you didn't even wait to see her finish her performance!"

"It probably looks very funny to you—but I didn't. Once I was left alone, I thought that perhaps I'd done the wrong thing in coming up here to make a row—it might make things worse for Glory in the end—so I decided to clear out before Ferrari came back and we started all over again. I walked as far as the Heath, picked up a taxi and drove to the Nirvana Club." The young man paused and his expression changed. "To hell with me and what I've been doing—how's Glory? How did she take it?"

"Suffering from shock, but she'll be all right in the morning. I believe that she's very fond of her grandfather?"

"Yes. That's why she's always hated not being allowed to see him!"

"Oh?" said Spears. "What was that?"

"Just one of the reasons for the trouble between her and the Count. The old man's been very ill and Ferrari flatly refused to allow Glory to go up and see him. He said that she upset the old man, that he didn't approve of the things she did and the way she spent her money . . ."

"Did Mr. van Zuyl know about you and your—attachment to his granddaughter?"

Calthrop moved restlessly. "Not unless Ferrari told him some lie or other. There's been nothing outside friendship between us!"

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. Winthrop Bruce felt desperately sorry for the young Guardsman. Calthrop was sitting very stiffly in his chair, staring at Spears with an expression in which defiance was mingled with an unutterable weariness. And it was he who voiced the thought that was in all their minds.

"There's one thing that I can't prove, Mr. Spears—and that is that I never left this room until I walked out of the window!"

"No," replied Spears quietly, "I don't see how you can!"

"Then you'd better arrest me, hadn't you—and get this cat-and-mouse business over!"

Again there was a silence. 'Good God,' thought Bruce, 'he did do it . . . he's going to confess!' He looked round the room. Caird was sitting forward in his chair, as

though waiting for something. Sergeant Ring had taken an involuntary step towards the door. Only Spears remained motionless, lounging back on the sofa, idly studying his sheaf of notes.

"I wonder!" said Spears, half to himself—and the tension was broken by a sharp knock on the door.

It was the finger-print expert and he was beaming.

"Well?" asked Spears. "Got anything?"

"Perfect set of prints on the gun, sir!"

"Good!" The Inspector turned, almost apologetically to Calthrop. "I'm sorry, Mr. Calthrop, but we'll have to have yours . . . just to see!"

To Bruce's surprise, David Calthrop did not flinch. "Certainly," he said, "I'd be glad!"

He was half-out of his chair when the finger-print expert stopped him. "I don't think we shall need to trouble you, sir!"

"What?" It was Spears' turn now to be surprised.

"I think you'll agree, Mr. Spears, when you've heard. The finger-prints on the gun, sir—they're the lady's!"

"The lady's?"

"That's right, sir. We've checked up . . . and they belong to the Countess Ferrari!"

CHAPTER VIII

Concerning a Ruby

"BUT," FINISHED SIMON SPEARS with a hopeless shrug, "every way we go we run up against those confounded finger-prints!"

The time was two days later, the scene an informal conference in the Assistant-Commissioner's room at Scotland Yard, the subject that bundle of contradictions which the newspapers, who had made a Roman holiday out of it, insisted on calling 'The Television Mystery.' Present were the A.C. himself—Major Cavendish, a bronzed, taciturn importation from the Indian Army—Sergeant Ring, and Inspector Simon Spears.

"On the face of it," went on Spears, "it looks as though Calthrop was our man; he had every reason to dislike Ferrari; he went to the house with the express intention of having a showdown with him; he admits to being there until after the Countess first appeared on the Television screen—after which he says the Count suddenly left him alone in the drawing-room, when he thought better of his little expedition and left the house by the French windows; and the 'CA' on the wainscoting applies very

nicely to him. There's no one to corroborate his story after the point at which the butler left the two men alone together—and the taxi driver who remembers picking him up on the Heath and taking him down to the 'Nirvana' can't say to within half an hour what time that was!"

"It looks pretty plain sailing," the A.C. agreed, "except that Mr. Calthrop couldn't have left the Countess's finger-prints on the gun!"

"Precisely!" Spears replied, with a touch of impatience. "Neither could Bastin nor any of the other servants who were in the house at the time; nor could the mysterious killer, whom we'll call X, who might have broken into the house through the garden-door in the wing in which old man van Zuyl lives (only just lives, by the way—he's pretty bad!). Whichever way you reason it, it all comes back to the gun. Our ballistics man, Evans, says there's no doubt that the bullet which killed Ferrari was fired from it . . . and, with her finger-prints on it, nobody could have fired it but the Countess herself!"

"She couldn't have handled it earlier...?"

"And someone else used it for the killing—silk handkerchief, rubber gloves and all that? No, sir," Spears shook his head, "in that case the prints would have been smudged—whereas actually they're perfect!"

"You've checked up on the Countess?"

"Not yet, sir. She's been pretty well knocked out by the shock of the whole affair —and, as far as she is concerned, the main fact is quite plain: that during the time when the murder was committed she was five or six miles away, at Alexandra Palace, appearing in front of a Television camera, with about half a million witnesses to prove it!"

"Including myself," said the A.C., knocking out his pipe—and added, with a rare trace of humanity, "Damned good-looking girl!"

"There are one or two things I want to check up with her, though," went on Spears, thoughtfully, "such as the reason why it took her nearly an hour to get back from the Television place to Hampstead, what she did with her car, how she managed to get her clothes soaking wet, and what was all that palaver about the ruby!"

At the mention of the ruby, the Assistant-Commissioner glanced at the newspapers scattered on the table in the window. "You've seen the papers, I suppose?"

"I have," said Spears, a little grimly. "We've rather frozen them out on news this time and they've let their imagination run riot!"

"According to most of them, there's no murderer but the 'Peacock Throne!'"

"Sensational tripe!"

The A.C. smiled at his subordinate's

violence and, rather surprisingly, quoted, "'There are more things in Heaven and earth . . . !'"

"I'm sorry, sir," interrupted Spears, "but I've yet to hear of any Mysterious Power that can carry a lady's finger-prints six miles and plant them on a pistol-butt!"

"That fellow on the *Wire* . . ."

"Northcote? They sent him to Amsterdam. He's grubbed up a lot of stuff about van Zeeland who owned the stone before the Ferraris bought it. Some of those jeweller fellows over there have given him a pack of legends about jewels in the past that were supposed to be fatal to the people who wore them . . . Lucrezia Borgia's pearl and all that . . . it's stale news, been in cheap magazines for years!"

"Clever, though. The *Wire's* a bright paper. I see, by the way, that they were the only people who managed to get the story about Calthrop!"

"Yes," agreed Spears, "and I'd like to know *how* they got it. Northcote was at Alexandra Palace the night the Countess broadcast; his name seems to be cropping up all along." He pulled out his pocket-book and scribbled a rapid note. "I think we'd better have a word with Master Northcote when he gets back from his little Dutch joy-ride!"

There was a knock at the door. It was

Walcott, the A.C.'s secretary, a thin, sandy young man who had served with his chief in the East.

"For Inspector Spears, sir!"

"Who is it?" Spears asked, glad of an opportunity to finish a conference which was getting them all precisely nowhere.

Walcott consulted the visiting-card in his hand. "James Tugwell," he read. "The Temple Garage, Temple Avenue, E.C.4," and added, "Something about a car!"

"Ah," said Spears, smiling for the first time since he had entered the room, and turned to the Assistant-Commissioner. "If you'll excuse me, sir——?"

"Go ahead! You'd better keep on the case night and day from now on. Sooner or later we'll have to give something to the Press!"

'I wonder,' thought Spears, as Ring followed him from the room, 'if there's a special department in Purgatory for Commissioners, Assistant and otherwise!'

. . . . .

It was a rather terrified Bastin who, late that same afternoon, showed Simon Spears into the white drawing-room at 'Five Cedars.' The catlike butler had not forgotten the winged and vitriolic words addressed to him on the night of the murder. Since then every

newspaperman in London had been on the 'phone without getting any change out of Bastin!

"The Countess, sir? She's out walking . . . on the Heath, I believe. Will you wait?"

"I will," said Spears.

"A drink, sir?"

"No, thank you. How's Mr. van Zuyl?"

"The old gentleman's very bad, sir. The doctors were here this morning; they're afraid he'll never be able to move or talk again!"

Dismissing the man, Spears lit a cigarette. Glancing idly at the books which filled the tall shelves between the windows, he let his thoughts wander to the sick-room upstairs. If only Abraham van Zuyl could have talked . . . if only he could have had the strength to have written down the true story of what had taken place in his room that fatal and eventful night . . .! This was a strange case—a case of dead ends and rank impossibilities and loose threads that might never tie together to make a pattern.

The lowest shelf of all was filled with beautiful bindings in tooled leather. He took out a volume and opened it . . . text in Italian . . . exquisite plates of swords and daggers and men in rich armour. As he replaced the book, his eye was caught by another volume, equally luxurious—except that the spine of it bore the prosaic words 'Press

Cuttings.' The words struck some chord in his mind. 'Press Cuttings' . . . of course, the book in Dryden's room, five years ago, which had given him the clue to the celebrated case of 'Death at Broadcasting House!' He took out the book and opened it. It was pasted full of newspaper clippings, each marked with its date and origin. Most of the clippings seemed to come from America and dealt with the career of Miss Gloria van Zuyl, apparently in the days before she had married Benito Ferrari. The strange vanity of rich people, he thought . . . to care what people thought and wrote about their money!

Laying down the book for a moment he turned to the window and stared out at the blowy April afternoon. It was a magnificent view, across the young green of the Heath to the Highgate Hills. His eye was caught by two figures which had just breasted the slope beyond the garden of 'Five Cedars.' The woman was hatless; her fair hair was blowing in the wind; her arm was linked affectionately in that of her companion, a slim tall figure whom Spears had no difficulty in recognizing as David Calthrop.

Gloria and Calthrop . . . the two of them together. What a pity that no microphone had been invented which could tell him what they were saying! He opened the window and headed for the Heath, only pausing in

the driveway to place the book marked 'Press Cuttings' well out of sight in the back of his car.

. . . . .

"Finger-prints or no finger-prints," Calthrop was saying, as they walked down towards the house, "they know you couldn't have done it!"

Gloria shook her head. "But what about you? Oh, God, David, it's all such a terrible mix-up!"

"Don't you worry about me, darling. Spears would have gaoled me, if he could, that night they dragged me back here; it was only the finger-prints that saved me." He paused. "The question is, how on earth did they get there? Did you ever have the pistol in your hands?"

"Well, yes, I did actually," she admitted after a second's pause. "The evening Mr. Bruce brought me back from Alexandra Palace, the evening that Benito—hit me. You know we had a flaming row after that. I told him what I thought of him and he said that if I felt that way why didn't I kill him—you know what his sense of humour was like. He took the gun out of a drawer in his desk and made me hold it." She gave a little reminiscent shiver. "It was almost as though he was trying to teach me how to shoot him!"

"And then?"

"He took it back."

"*How* did he take it?" Calthrop's question was insistent.

"Well, I gave it to him and I suppose he took it by the barrel. I can't really remember!"

"You'd better try and remember, Glory. It might be important!"

But Gloria van Zuyl was not listening to him any longer. Coming towards them from the road she had seen Simon Spears.

"Look!" she said and, instinctively, removed her arm from her companion's.

Gloria greeted the detective with a nonchalance that was visibly an effort. After a muttered "How d'you do?" Calthrop remained obstinately silent.

"So glad to see you better, Countess," said Spears, and turned to the other. "You'll excuse me, Mr. Calthrop, but I've a question or two I'd like to ask the Countess—alone!"

"I see!" said Calthrop, and turned to Gloria. "Would *you* rather I stayed?"

"No, no, David. After all, the Inspector has got to find out what I know about things . . . and we'd better get it over now!"

"Very well," said Calthrop shortly and, raising his hat to them, strode away down the slope.

Spears and Gloria walked on slowly towards the house.

"You weren't very happy with your husband, were you?" said Spears suddenly.

"I guess not," she replied after a resentful pause. "Married life isn't always as rosy as it's painted!"

"He ill-treated you?"

"He had a very violent temper!"

"But yet you never made up your mind to leave him?"

"I did not!"

"Nor thought of any other way in which you could have got rid of him?"

Gloria turned on Spears with blazing eyes. "Are you trying to suggest, Mr. Spears, that I killed him?"

"There wouldn't be any point in it, would there, Countess? After all, you were at Alexandra Palace when he died!"

"Yes," she said, "I was at Alexandra Palace."

"You left there shortly after ten o'clock—in your car?"

"That's right."

"And arrived here shortly after eleven o'clock—without your car!"

"I had a breakdown—the battery went."

"Where was that?"

"Not far from the Television place. It was in rather a dark road. There was no one about and I couldn't get the car started up

again. It was raining, so I walked for about half a mile, to some cross-roads where there were lights, and picked up a taxi!"

"You left a valuable car like that, in a strange district, without sending anyone to collect it?"

"It had my name in it. Someone would bring it back—and I was very tired!"

Spears paused and looked at her thoughtfully. "That doesn't explain," he said slowly, "why the car was picked up next morning on the Victoria Embankment!"

"Oh!" she said—and there was genuine surprise in the exclamation.

"A garage hand at Tugwell's in Temple Avenue found it as he came to work. A street cleaner told him that it had been there since midnight, so he moved it into the garage. He had to go out on a job, so he left a note for his boss, asking him to ring up the police. The note went astray and we only heard from Mr. Tugwell this morning."

Gloria shrugged her shoulders. "Somebody must have found it and taken a cheap joy-ride into Town!"

"Perhaps," said Spears politely. "I only wanted to get at the facts."

Gloria showed her first sign of anxiety. "Is that all you want to know?" she asked.

"Almost. You must forgive these questions, Countess. They're merely a formality. There's

just one thing more." He paused and watched her closely. "What about the 'Peacock Throne'?"

"I should have thought you'd have known all about that from the newspapers!" She seemed quite undisturbed by the question.

But Spears was not to be diverted from his purpose. "You wore it for the broadcast. Why were you so agitated about it when you left?"

"Agitated?" Her forehead wrinkled, almost as though she were trying to recall something which she had half-forgotten.

"So Mr. Bruce, the Television Director, says. He remembers your saying something about the 'Peacock Throne.' 'The most awful thing that could have happened'—those were the words he thought he heard!"

Gloria seemed to be thinking. "Well," she said at last, slowly, "I guess I must have been a bit on edge. That television business had taken it out of me—and it was rather an upset to have lost my ruby into the bargain!"

"Lost it?" Spears halted and took her by the arm. "You don't mean to tell me that you lost $150,000-worth of ruby that night?"

"I'm afraid so. I guess it was pretty careless of me."

"And you never informed the police?"

She stared back at him angrily. "Do you

suppose, Mr. Spears, that I've been in the mood these last two days to go worrying about *that*?"

"No," he admitted, "I can understand that. But you'd better let me get ahead and find out what *did* happen to the stone!"

For a moment she was silent—and Spears could almost have sworn that there was fear in her eyes. "For God's sake," she said suddenly, "don't go worrying about the 'Peacock Throne'—only find out who killed my husband and put an end to all this dreadful business!"

"But your ruby . . . the value of it! The insurance people will want to know where it is and how you lost it!"

"Please don't go on about the ruby, Inspector. I shan't claim for it. I never want to see it again. I believe it's true, what Mr. Northcote and the newspapers said about it, that there's a curse on the 'Peacock Throne'—and that's why Benito died that night!"

They had reached the entrance to the driveway. "I'm sorry," said Spears gently, "to have to worry you about what must seem to be irrelevant details—even though they do happen to be in the $150,000 class—but we must get to the bottom of everything in this business. I don't say the loss of your ruby has anything to do with the killing of Count Ferrari, but it might have—and every step

that gets us nearer to a solution will be better for you . . . and Mr. Calthrop, too!"

"Mr. Calthrop? But you know that he couldn't have——"

"I know," Spears interrupted, "that his finger-prints weren't on the gun. All the same, he was in the house that evening—there's a mass of evidence piled up against him—and, if we can't get any nearer to the truth, we might have to arrest him!"

The last words came to Spears as a last-minute inspiration—and he was interested to note from the expression on her face as he said good-bye to her that they had struck home!

CHAPTER IX

'Seeing the Wheels go Round'

"MR. SPEARS DOWN HERE, SIR . . . he'd like to know if you could spare the time to let him have a look at the Studios?"

Miss Fellowes entered the office which she shared with Winthrop Bruce, to find her chief, with his hand masking the telephone, using language which bordered on the disgusting.

"I'm fed up with the van Zuyl affair!" he said bitterly. "No one seems to be doing a stroke of work here—you all go round the place looking as though you were Sherlock Holmes or Philo Vance. This morning a man in my club said, 'Hello, Bruce, and how's your murder going?' as though I'd pistolled Ferrari myself! You go and show Inspector Spears round, Miss Fellowes. According to Caird, he has quite an eye for the ladies!"

Miss Fellowes' air of shocked disapproval quite restored his good humour. "It's lucky," he said, "that I don't have to buy you a pair of silk stockings every time I pull your leg!" and, uncovering the telephone receiver, he gave orders that Spears was to be taken to the entrance of the Studio Floor, where

he would meet him in two minutes' time.

When the two men met, at the entrance to the long corridor which was, so to speak, the main street of Television, Bruce was curious.

"Forgive my asking," he said, "but does this visit mean that you people are trying to tie Gloria van Zuyl's broadcast in with the murder in Hampstead?"

"Well, not exactly," Spears replied, "only I'll admit to you, Mr. Bruce, that we've come up against a bit of a dead end at 'Five Cedars' and, when that happens, I believe in shifting my ground. In any case, I've read so much about this box of tricks of yours in the last few days that I'll be interested to see what it's really like!"

"The set-up," Bruce explained, "is simple enough. Dressing-rooms on the right. Make-up Room half-way down, also on the right. Scene dock at the far end—that's for settings that we're actually using in a programme. The two big Studios are on your left—A. and B. The room between them is the Central Control Room . . . a newish addition to our amenities. Central Control enables us to use two Studios simultaneously on a complicated programme with the cameras in both 'mixed' and controlled from one of the Control Galleries!"

Spears nodded as he rapidly sketched a rough floor-plan. "Pretty much like the

Dramatic Control Panel at Broadcasting House!" he said.

"Of course," Bruce replied, "you must have gone into all that at B.H. when you were with Caird on the Parsons Case. Well, our Control is more or less the same as the old D.C. Panel, except, of course, that it's for Sound *and* Vision!"

"And the Control Galleries?"

"One for each Studio. A. is at the top of that iron ladder there. B.'s is built out over the Studio itself, like a bow-window. It looks better but actually it's liable to be rather a nuisance . . . gets in the way of scene setting!"

"Studio B.," said Spears thoughtfully. "You used that, didn't you, for the programme the night Countess Ferrari broadcast?"

"We did. B. alone, without Central Control!"

The detective opened the door and looked into the Studio. Deserted and almost in darkness except for a stream of light from above where an engineer was working in the Control Gallery, it had a slightly sinister air with its coiling cables and tall hooded cameras.

"We had a special Chinese setting for the Countess," explained Bruce, "in that corner over there. Until it was time for her appearance, she stood and watched the programme on that check-back screen there."

"Anyone with her?"

"Probably the other artists; they generally like to 'look in' before and after they're on the screen. Miss Easton would have been there, too; it's her job to watch how make-up is coming over!"

"And on the floor itself, while she was being televised?"

"Engineers, camera-men, the stage managers, probably a stage hand or two!"

"No public in the Studio?"

"Not during a programme. Actually that night we had a newspaperman here—Northcote of the *Wire*!"

"Ah, yes," murmured Spears, "Northcote." He looked searchingly round the shadowy studio. "Quite a lot of stuff in here, eh? I wonder you don't lose things!"

"It wouldn't be easy. The gear gets shifted around every day."

"And I suppose you have cleaners in?"

"Every morning." Bruce laughed. "If you're looking for clues, Inspector, I'm afraid we haven't found any!"

Spears turned and led the way back into the corridor. "And when the Countess arrived here—?" he asked.

"She was taken straight to this dressing-room." Bruce opened a door opposite the Studio.

"Anyone share it with her?"

"Yes, Mamontova, the ballet dancer."

"This room would be thoroughly cleaned, too?"

"Every day!"

"Did Northcote come in here while the Countess was dressing?"

"I understand that he was waiting here when she came back from having her make-up removed. He bothered her for an interview, but she was in a very nervous state after the broadcast, and Maclean—he's my Productions Manager—had to have Northcote turned out!"

"Thank you," said Spears. "And now can I have a word with everyone who was in actual contact with the Countess on the evening of the broadcast?"

"Certainly," Bruce replied. "That means Maclean, Churchman, Crawford and Josephine Easton. You'd better see them in the Make-up Room; it's quiet in there and you won't be disturbed. You don't need me any more, do you? I've told you all I know . . . and I happen to have quite a lot of work to get through!"

Spears glanced through an open doorway into the machine-room with its great grey-painted dynamos whose smooth sleek silence so belied the power and the mystery they generated. "I shouldn't be surprised if you had," he said, amiably enough. Bruce accord-

ingly escorted him to the Make-up Room and, offering him a cigarette, left him to his own devices.

. . . . .

A further extract from the personal diary of Miss Josephine Easton:

"No end of excitement this afternoon. Spears, the C.I.D. man on the Ferrari murder, came up to A.P. to put us all through the hoop. Rather good-looking in a Basil Rathboneish sort of way. Maggie was away so I had the whole works to myself, and they used the Make-up Room for the Grand Inquisition. The actual cross-examination was a flattish sort of business—no one got 'grilled' or beaten on the head with rubber-clubs. I don't believe S. can have found out much. Mac told him about the actual running of the show and the bother with Northcote. Steve fetched down his 'Programme as Broadcast' book and confirmed the actual time that Gloria was on the air. S. didn't even seem to want to see the Studio, though Steve was pining to show off on the Control Panel. I believe I got more than any of them. How long was G. van Z. in the Make-up Room? Did anything out of the ordinary happen? I could only say all over again what I wrote in this diary the other night; that G. wasn't a bit friendly, that I was surprised to be able to spot that her hair had

been touched up (with her cash I'd have made a better job of it!), and that she was awfully nervous, more so after the show than before—which was stupid.

"Then I remembered Jim having the photo taken of G. actually making-up. Jim brought it down and Spears had a long *dekko* at it, asked if he could take it away. Jim said yes, so then Spears started asking me a lot of questions about Mamontova (that cow!). Had Mamontova taken any special interest in G.? Had she been in the room when G. took the ruby off her neck after the show? Did G. have the ruby on when she came to have her make-up removed? I'm beginning to wonder whether Spears is after the murderer at all. Perhaps the blessed 'Peacock Throne' has been pinched—though I can't see what good a thing that size would be to anyone—certainly not to a poor hardworking girl like yours truly!

"By the time S. left the whole afternoon was wasted. Thought Maggie would have a fit when she came back and found the Make-up Room full of smoke and cigarette ends! Luckily it was her night on, so for once Jim could take me to dinner in Soho and a movie. I kept on about Tyrone Power until he actually grabbed my hand—and kept it! Pity that nice men are always so damned respectful, while the other kind are just stoats! Talking of stoats, D. Northcote is still in

Amsterdam, thank God! Heaven help a poor Dutch girl on a night like this!"

. . . . .

Driving rather gloomily down into London, Simon Spears turned over his conclusions. Before leaving Alexandra Palace, he had had a word with the head cleaner, a pure George Belcher character by name Mrs. Timms, confirmed that her workers had discovered nothing unusual in Studio B., the dressing-rooms or the Make-up Department, asked her to have the place thoroughly searched again next morning. If Gloria van Zuyl had in fact lost the 'Peacock Throne' on the night of the broadcast, it looked as though it couldn't still be lying around the place!

He glanced at the slip of paper which lay on the seat beside him. On it, according to his custom, he had scribbled down the questions to which he required an answer:

(*a*) Was the P.T. lost through Gloria's carelessness?
(*b*) Or was it taken by someone?
(*c*) If so, by whom?
(*d*) Does G. suspect—or know—the identity of the thief?
(*e*) Has the P.T. really been lost or is it all just hysterical nonsense and has G. got it safely in her jewel case?

(*f*) Whatever the answer is, what the hell has all this got to do with the murder of F.?

He sighed heavily as he swung his car round the merry-go-round at Camden Town. It seemed impossible to make sense out of a situation in which someone claimed to have mislaid a small fortune and yet flatly refused to do anything about recovering it!

Concentrating on (*c*) he considered in his mind the list of possible suspects. The people on Bruce's staff could be ruled out; none of them had been alone with the 'Peacock Throne' on the night in question—except the Easton girl and she was no female Raffles! The artists in the 'Picture Parade' programme? Minetti, the Illusionist . . . one of the most highly paid stars of Vaudeville, unlikely to extend his disappearing-trick from goldfish-bowls to rubies! O'Hara—the comedians—Watson Howe, the dress designer . . . unlikely, too—and anyway, they only saw her in the Studio, whereas Maclean had confirmed that Gloria had still worn the jewel when she left to go back to her dressing-room. Mamontova? A distinct possibility . . . exiled Russian . . . rather past her prime as a dancer . . . probably hard-up. And then that fellow Northcote . . . Enterprising journalists did not usually make a practice of stealing the jewellery they were sent to write-

up. It was odd, though, the way in which Northcote's name kept on cropping up in the story!

He made up his mind to concentrate on the dancer and the journalist and, with the idea of going at once to Fleet Street and having a few words with the absent Northcote's editor, turned his car to the right into Euston Road. Mentally he added a seventh question to the list on the seat beside him: (*g*) Supposing either N. or M. has in fact stolen the darned thing and G. knows that they have, why on earth should she want to keep the theft dark?

"No reason at all!" he said aloud. "Unless . . ." Then, seized with a sudden idea, he leant over and scribbled excitedly at the foot of his page of notes . . . and in the process almost succeeded in slaying an elderly lady who was wandering blithely across the crowded street in the direction of the Quaker Book Shop!

* * * * *

Mr. Albert Horner, who alternated day and night duty as doorkeeper at the offices of the *Wire*, considered himself to be quite an authority on the subject of Crime; he devoured all the leading detective stories as they came out in the sixpenny editions—and a distant cousin of his wife's had been unfortunate

enough to figure as the Torso in a particularly depressing South Coast murder. Mr. Horner was therefore all of a twitter when he was asked to announce to the Editor that Mr. Spears of Scotland Yard would like to see him —and practically swooned with excitement when that same Mr. Spears, on his way out from the interview, paused at the window of his glass-fronted cubby-hole.

Spears had found the Editor of the *Wire* singularly unresponsive to his tactful inquiries regarding Dudley Northcote. As far as the Editor knew, his employee was still in Amsterdam; he believed that Robertson, the Night Editor, had given him the assignment—though what Northcote was supposed to be doing there he (the Editor) would very much like to know, as he had only telegraphed one batch of copy and was already twenty-four hours overdue in returning. Yes, he agreed with Mr. Spears that Northcote's stuff was pretty good tripe, but tripe was what the public wanted, as long as it was good tripe and not too pretty. If Mr. Spears would tell him exactly why he was making his inquiries, he'd do his best to help with any further information, otherwise he was sure that Mr. Spears would excuse him as he happened to be a very busy man (implying that Mr. Spears wasn't!). Good afternoon!

It was on the off-chance of being able to find

out a little more about Northcote from less exalted circles that Spears stopped on his way out to talk to the doorman. Mr. Horner proved to be as informative as the Editor had been close. "Mr. Northcote, sir? What a one. Wild as they make 'em!"

"Oh," said Spears, "I had the impression that he wasn't exactly popular about the place!"

"Some of 'em don't like 'im, sir, it's true—'e's very free with 'is language—doesn't give a cuss what 'e says, but I must say 'e's far more to *my* taste than some of the milk-and-water young gentlemen you get in Fleet Street nowadays!"

"You read the stuff he writes—for instance, those articles of his about the Ferrari case and the ruby?"

"I did, sir," replied Mr. Horner with an approving nod. "And very nice, too. 'E was in ahead of everyone with 'em—all that stuff about the 'Peacock Throne' and the fatal curse. I dare say that came of 'is being a friend of the Countess's!"

"A friend?" Spears pricked up his ears. "You mean that he'd interviewed her up at the B.B.C.?"

"Well, no, sir, between you and me and that doorpost there, it was a bit more than business. Why, I can remember the evening she came to see 'im 'ere and——"

"The Countess came *here*?" Spears interrupted.

Mr. Horner's voice faltered a little. "Per'aps I shouldn't 'ave said anything . . ." he mumbled.

"Go on!" said Spears tersely—and as the doorman hesitated, he slid a couple of half-crowns unobtrusively across the little counter.

"Just tell me about that—it may be important!"

"You mean—to the Yard?" Mr. Horner's eyes glowed with detective fire as he gratefully pocketed the tip. "Well, it must 'ave been four or five nights ago—Monday, yes, that was it!"

"But it couldn't have been," said Spears. "That was the night of the broadcast—the night Ferrari was killed!"

"Let me look at my book, sir. I keep a record of all visitors. Let me see—I was on night duty, so it must 'ave been Monday." Mr. Horner with maddening leisureliness thumbed over the pages of a rather tattered ledger. "Yes, 'ere it is. Monday, April 25th . . . 10.17. Lady—to see Mr. Northcote. I put down 'Lady' because she didn't give me 'er name!"

"Then what did you tell Mr. Northcote when you telephoned up to him?"

"What she told me to, sir. She said 'Tell 'im, the lady 'e was with 'alf an hour ago.' It

was only next morning, when I read about the murder in the paper and saw 'er photograph, that I knew 'oo it was!"

"Did Northcote see her?"

"No," said Mr. Horner, "'e didn't—in fact 'e was quite emphatic that 'e didn't want to see 'er and told me to tell 'er that 'e 'adn't been in and wouldn't be coming in, either. It's not the first time I've 'ad to say that for 'im to ladies!"

"You're sure it was the Countess?" Spears dived into his brief-case and produced the dressing-room photograph which Jim Churchman had given him. "You'd recognize her from this?"

Mr. Horner studied the picture admiringly. "It's 'er!" he said, with more emphasis than grammar.

"Did she come in a car?"

"Yes, she did. Big long grey car—quite a whopper—drove it 'erself, 'cos I noticed 'er pull up by the kerb there!"

There was a long silence while Simon Spears replaced the photograph, studied the visitors' book for the second time, stared at Mr. Horner and scratched his head.

"Well," he said slowly, "I'll be damned!"

Chapter X

Concerning a Flat

On a sun-blistered bench at the edge of the Heath sat rather a large gentleman, wearing rather a small Homburg hat and reading his newspaper with ferocious intensity. A great reader, that gentleman; he had sat there since early morning—it was now close on three o'clock on May Day afternoon—browsing through his copy of the *Wire*, taking in everything from Steamer Arrivals to 'What to do with a Beetroot.' The bench on which he sat gave an excellent view of the house known as 'Five Cedars,' the front door plainly visible through the lower branches of the trees, the servants' entrance at the end of a little asphalt path hedged with privet.

Detective-Sergeant Ring put down his newspaper and stared at the rambling white house with disgust. Late the previous afternoon, his chief, Inspector Simon Spears, had returned to the Yard from Fleet Street with an expression of almost human excitement on his face and plunged in to see the Assistant-Commissioner. What it was all about Ring hadn't the slightest idea . . . except that as Spears came out of the A.C.'s den, he had heard him say some-

thing to the effect that "She may not have done it, sir, but she's the one who's going to show us who did!"—and that five minutes later Spears had sent him to keep an eye on the Countess Ferrari and 'Five Cedars,' with the assistance of a young officer called Lannigan, fresh from the Police College at Hendon, whose Oxford accent and sense of humour filled Sergeant Ring with gloomy foreboding.

He sighed—and wished that something would happen. Ring had worked on a good many cases with Simon Spears but never on one quite so puzzling to an honest subordinate as this Ferrari business. It was a queer affair and no mistake. Nothing ever happened! For six days now Spears had been mooching round the place with a bad-tempered scowl. His return from Fleet Street had brought a gleam of hope to Ring's heart but, after six hours spent on a bench on Hampstead Heath, eating his lunch out of a bag, that hope had died; if the Countess Ferrari *was* going to show them who had murdered her husband, she was being pretty slow about it!

Lannigan had been on duty the previous night and reported no movement from the house, except for the arrival at the side-entrance of a buxom young lady in a red hat, which had been followed by half an hour of whispering and scuffling behind the privet

which seemed to suggest that spring had come to Bastin the butler ('Why do they have to talk like that?' thought Ring, after listening to his junior's report. 'Why can't he just say that they were having a bit of slap-and-tickle!')

Since Ring had taken over, at 9 a.m., there had been no sign of the Countess; a few tradespeople had called, a photographer had taken a picture of the house—probably for one of the papers—that was all; otherwise the sleepy Maytime weather had been quite undisturbed by incident. Ring was used to his chief's method with cases like this—the way in which he insisted on picking up every tiny piece of the jigsaw before putting the puzzle together, but, in his opinion, this time Spears was waiting too long. Of course, there had been that dead-end of the finger-prints—but why not go ahead and arrest somebody—Calthrop or that slimy butler chap—anyone. There was such a thing as being too clever and biding your time too long . . .!

"Hello!" said a cheerful voice. "Having a nice time?"

Ring turned round hurriedly. It was Philip Lannigan, tall, slim and Irish, in a grey flannel suit that would have made the Chief Commissioner look shabby. In his hand he carried a steel-shafted golf club—a Number Two Iron.

"Cut the comedy!" said Ring severely—and

added "What the so-and-so are you carrying that hockey stick around for?"

"Idea of my own, Sergeant—keep an eye on Ferrari Hall and improve my approach-shots at the same time! Who's going to suspect a solitary golfer of being the Hooded Menace of Scotland Yard!"

Ring spluttered explosively. This kind of play-acting would be the ruin of the Force.

"Like to have a smack yourself?" asked the other and was about to tee-up an aged golf ball, when Ring stopped him. "You can fool around after I've gone!" he said. "But in the meantime, have you got any news for me?"

Lannigan grinned unrepentantly and rummaged in the pocket of his coat. He produced a folded slip of paper and handed it over. "Only this," he said. "List of 'phone-calls to and from the house there. Calthrop's called her five times—she's called him twice. *Ah, l'amour!* Plenty of lovey-doveying but nothing that's any use to us. Calthrop's dining to-night with Bruce, the Television man, up at Alexandra Palace . . . asked her to come along, too, but she wouldn't . . . said she couldn't bear the thought of the place now. He got rather annoyed . . . said he couldn't understand why she still had the jitters—and she hung up on him . . . called him back five minutes later, though, and was as sweet as pie!"

Ring studied the typewritten list in his hand. "Museum 0012?" he asked. "What's that? I see she called it four times!"

"Well, yes," Lannigan agreed. "That might be worth looking into. She did call four times and got no reply. Apparently she was worried about it, because twice she rang the Hampstead supervisor and asked her to have the number specially rung. As a matter of fact, the supervisor reported that the same Museum number's been called nearly a hundred times since April the 25th with a request for a special ringing!"

"Know where it is?"

"I looked into that. It's a house in Gordon Square—Number 33a. The place has been split up into four service flats and the 'phone is in one of 'em!"

"Very well," said Ring. "Then I'll be getting along." He paused, and then added with a wintry smile, "I must say that you seem to have handled the telephone business pretty well!"

"Thank you, Sergeant!" replied Lannigan with a bow. "Praise from you is praise indeed!"

But when he turned at the top of the hill and glanced back to find his subordinate swinging gracefully at the daisies, Ring decided that it was unwise to let these young fellows know that anything they did was right;

if you didn't keep them well under your thumb, they had a way of getting very much above themselves!

. . . . .

The caretaker at Number 33a Gordon Square, Mrs. Fortinbras, turned out to be a thin-lipped and middle-aged person whose obvious motto was to mind her own business and allow other people to mind theirs! When she realized that Sergeant Ring was not a prospective tenant, she became very distant and attempted to shut the door in his face—and it required the information that he was a police officer in the course of his duty to bring a more respectful, if a trifle frightened, expression to her bleak countenance.

"Yes, sir, I've got four flats to look after here—and I live in the basement myself, with my daughter."

"Are all the flats let?"

"Well, three of 'em are and the other—well, yes, I suppose you would call it 'let'!"

"What do you mean?" asked Ring with interest.

"What I mean is that the young lady came and took it, paid two weeks in advance, stayed here four days—at least I suppose she did stay here—she certainly brought some luggage with her but I never did see her about the

place—and I didn't know that she was gone until I had to go up last Tuesday morning to ask her about the gas men coming in, and I found that she'd left and taken her things with her. It's all rather difficult," complained Mrs. Fortinbras. "I've had other people after the flat but I couldn't really let it until her two weeks were up!"

"What was the young lady like?"

"Very fair, middle-sized and what I dare say you'd call pretty!" Her words held all the disapproval of disappointed middle age for the young and attractive.

"Name?"

"She said Miss Larrimore—Miss Carol Larrimore!"

Ring paused and consulted his list. "There's a 'phone in the flat. Is the number Museum 0012?"

"Why, yes," replied Mrs. Fortinbras in surprise. "It is. And what a 'phone, too. Ever since last Tuesday it's done nothing but ring-ring-ring away up there until it's gone through my head!"

Ring followed the caretaker upstairs and was admitted to the flat. He went over the place carefully—bedroom, sitting-room, bath and tiny kitchen. There was nothing to be learned there. Miss Larrimore had apparently removed all her belongings when she left—and the place itself had the impersonal

drabness of apartments where the tenants never settle long enough to give them the colour of personality.

"So that's all you can tell me?" he said at last.

Mrs. Fortinbras hesitated. "Well, there is one little thing—only I don't want to say it if it's going to get anybody into trouble!"

"You can tell me," Ring assured her. "I'll keep it quiet!"

"It's about Miss Larrimore . . ."

"Oh, yes?"

"Well, I—I—" The caretaker fumbled nervously for her words. "I don't think that she *was* Miss Larrimore!"

"No?" replied Ring.

"I think she was here incognito, as the saying goes!"

"Incognito, eh? Then who do you think she really was?"

The woman's hands trembled as she rummaged in the pocket of her dress and drew out a crumpled cutting from a newspaper. "I may be wrong, sir—of course it's always rather dark in here, but as soon as I saw the paper that day, I thought it was the same. 'Madge,' I said to myself, 'if that's not Miss Larrimore, then your name isn't——'"

But Ring didn't wait for her to finish her sentence. With a quick movement he took the press cutting out of her hand and un-

folded it. The photograph at the foot of it was headed:

SEEN BY MILLIONS AS HUSBAND DIED

and the picture was one of Miss Gloria van Zuyl!

. . . . .

Up in Winthrop Bruce's office David Calthrop stood looking across the big reservoirs towards the dull umbered glow that hangs perpetually over London at night. Bruce himself was watching the last scene of a televised play on the screen in the corner of the room. He was almost too preoccupied to notice, much less to sympathize with, the repressed anxiety of his friend.

The play finished and the attractive dark-haired girl announcer began to give details of the next day's programmes. Bruce switched off the set. "I know the view's worth looking at, especially at night, David," he said, "but why not look at it sitting down?"

And he pushed a box of cigarettes across the desk.

Calthrop did not reply for a moment—then he swung suddenly round. "I can't stand it much longer!" he said—and his voice was taut from overstrained nerves. "I simply can't!"

"You're not going to tell me—?" Bruce began, then stopped.

Calthrop laughed. The sound was disagreeable. "That I did it? No, oddly enough, I didn't. It isn't me, Bruce—I can take care of myself; it's—it's Glory!"

"She's naturally upset," replied Bruce cautiously.

"Of course!" Calthrop agreed. "Who wouldn't be? But she's more than that; she's worried—and I think she's scared. Quite apart from the general worry and mystery of the thing, there's something that's getting her down badly!"

"How does she feel about—about Ferrari?"

"You don't have to ask me that—you saw what kind of a swine he was. No, it's something else—something I'd give my eyes to help her with—only I can't, because she won't trust me!"

"I see!"

"And when you love somebody as much as I love Glory," ended the young man simply, "that's hell!"

Bruce twiddled a ruler absent-mindedly, and shifted the position of three files and an ink-pot. "You don't suppose that—forgive my saying this, David!—that she *had* anything to do with the shooting?"

Calthrop laughed again. "D'you think I'd blame her if she had? But everyone knows that it's a stark raving impossibility—you know it, I know it, and so do all the people

who turned on your programme that night. She was here—and, if anyone was there, it was I—but all the same *I* didn't do it. What I can't understand is," he went on hopelessly, "why the police are being so cagey? That inquest was a farce . . . Spears let them bring in 'Murder by person or persons unknown' without offering any evidence . . . nothing about me . . . not even a word about the finger-prints! What are they holding out for? What the devil is it all about?"

"Search me!" replied Bruce simply. "I think personally that Spears hasn't the slightest idea who did it or how it happened; he's clean up a gum-tree—and you can't blame him, with those finger-prints to face up to!" He rose from the desk and stubbed out his cigarette. "No, David, all you can do is to sit tight and bite on the bullet . . . and don't let Gloria do anything silly. And now," he concluded, opening the door, "if you don't mind a bit of a walk, I'm going to take you downstairs for a drink!"

Apart from the strictly modernized and mechanized corner of it which is occupied by the B.B.C., Alexandra Palace is a strange cross between an exhibition hall and a Victorian museum. Though its charming parkland, its skating-rink and organ recitals still bring North Londoners up the hill, it dates from the Victorian Age of Improvement, when gentle-

men of financial acumen combined with Nonconformist Uplifters to provide Wholesome Entertainment for the Masses. As Bruce and Calthrop made their way through the vast deserted hall upon which the main doors of the Palace open, their footsteps echoed weirdly; the place was a wilderness of dust and shadows under the great glass roof. Automatic machines, stuffed wild animals behind glass, and plaster casts of eminent philosophers of antiquity were spaced incongruously along the walls of the cloisters surrounding the Main Hall.

Bruce was about to reopen the conversation, when suddenly Calthrop halted in his stride and with an exclamation threw himself upon the short stalwart figure which had been trailing them through the shadows of the hall. "David! What the devil are you doing?"

But Calthrop did not reply. "I thought so!" he said, peering into the face of Sergeant Ring who had had no difficulty in shaking loose the grip of a man who must have been at least three stone lighter than himself.

"Better not try that, sir," said Ring coolly. "I don't want to have to detain you for assaulting the police!"

"I don't give a damn what you do!" snarled Calthrop. "You see, Bruce? Glory said she thought they were watching her . . . now

they're watching me, too! I want to know what the hell it's all about!"

With an imperturbable expression Ring restored his felt hat to the straight. "I'm obeying my orders, sir," he said quietly.

"Orders from Inspector Spears? Very well, then, Inspector Spears and I are going to have a showdown—right now. Where can I find him—at the Yard?"

"That's right, sir. I'm going that way myself, so perhaps I could give you a lift!"

Calthrop turned to Bruce. "Sorry, 'Winnie,' to cut the drink and all that, but I've got to see this through—otherwise we'll never have any peace of mind!" He turned back to the Sergeant with a curt gesture. "Well, come along," he said, "if you want to!"

Winthrop Bruce, watching them disappear through the half-darkness towards the main entrance, shook his head in complete and utter bewilderment. He didn't for a moment believe that David Calthrop had killed Count Benito Ferrari, but there were times in this crazy business when he wondered whether the hot-tempered young Guardsman wasn't going a little out of his mind . . . !

. . . . .

When the telephonist at Scotland Yard announced the arrival of Sergeant Ring and

his companion, Simon Spears was seated at his desk, playing his interminable game with bits of paper.

"Send them right up!" he said, and turned back to study again the problem laid out in front of him. Each square of paper had written on it one of the facts in the Ferrari Case, and Simon Spears, by dint of studying them and arranging them in some rough kind of order, was endeavouring to make sense of some sort out of the happenings of the past five days.

FERRARI—Said good-bye to G. 8.15—received C. 8.35—left C. (C. says) 1 minute after G. appeared on screen—say 9.18—shot 9.24 approx.

VAN ZUYL—Said good-bye to F. 8.15—arrived A.P. 8.30—entered Studio 8.58 approx.—televised 9.17-9.25—left A.P. 10.3 approx.—called *Wire* office 10.17—home 11.5.

CALTHROP—With Bruce Guards Club 7.0 till ?—arrived 'Five C.' 8.35—left 9.20 approx. (he says)—taxi Nirvana Club—Ring picked up there 11.15.

FLAT GORDON SQUARE—Why did G. rent—and why telephone? *And* why alias?

GREY BENTLEY—Left (G. says) North London between 10.15 and 10.40 (say)—but Horner saw her with car Fleet Street 10.17—why leave car on Embankment?—Tugwell's evidence.

These and similar notes on the case, all in Spears' fine handwriting, were scattered all over the blotter. They made up as bewildering a jigsaw as he had run across in his career. When Ring knocked deferentially at the door, he looked up eagerly. Maybe this unexpected visit of Calthrop's would supply one of the pieces still missing!

Calthrop did not waste time on politeness. "I want to know," he said, striding up to the desk, "exactly what the devil you think you are up to!"

"Having you followed, Mr. Calthrop. The explanation is quite a simple one. We're not at all satisfied about this case—and we're still interested enough in the various people concerned in it to want to know exactly what they are up to—particularly when they go visiting Alexandra Palace!"

"I was there on a private visit to my friend Bruce!"

"In that case," said Spears pleasantly, "I apologize!"

"I'm afraid, Spears, that isn't good enough. If you still don't believe that I didn't kill Ferrari, why don't you jug me and get it over!"

"A little matter of finger-prints . . .!"

"You know that Gloria can't have done it!"

"I know nothing," Spears replied, "but it certainly *looks* impossible!"

"Then for God's sake, leave her alone!" the younger man fired back. "Do you want to crack up her nerve completely?"

"That wouldn't suit me at all," said Spears, half to himself. "As a matter of fact there are a whole lot of questions I still want to ask the lady!"

"Then ask them and have done with it. This cat-and-mouse business will drive us both crazy—and get you nowhere!"

Spears shrugged and lay back in his chair. As he did so, his telephone bell rang. With a murmured apology he reached for the instrument.

"Lannigan speaking, sir . . . 'phone box in Baker Street!"

"Get on, man, what is it?"

"The Countess—she's gone, sir!"

"Gone?"

"Left the house fifteen minutes ago."

"Alone?"

"No, sir. A gentleman called to see her—I've got his description—and they went off together, in a blue coupé car—number PXZ4720—with some luggage. I managed to stop a car that was passing and followed them to the crossing of Baker Street and Marylebone Road, then we got stalled in the traffic and lost them!"

"Right, Lannigan—report here as soon as you can!" rapped out Spears, and slammed

down the receiver. "Ring, get a move on. Put out a general radio call on blue coupé, number PXZ4720. I don't want it stopped. I just want to know where it's going to. Step on it!"

Ring vanished.

"What's happened?" asked Calthrop, white to the lips.

"Everything," said Spears shortly. "Your friend, Countess Ferrari, has taken things into her own hands. Just when I needed her to help me straighten out things, she's bolted!" He leaned forward and clasped his hands on the desk in front of him. "Mr. Calthrop," he said, "I'm going to do exactly what you yourself suggested I should do, a moment ago . . . I'm going to put you under arrest!"

Chapter XI

Flight to Amsterdam

As Simon Spears drove into Town next morning, he noted with mixed feelings the news-bills that announced:

ARREST OF GUARDS OFFICER

In the course of a sleepless night he had begun to wonder whether his sudden instinct to arrest Calthrop and thereby try to force the truth out of Gloria van Zuyl hadn't been a mistake after all. He couldn't hold Calthrop for long, not without bringing up the business of the finger-prints and blowing his own case to pieces; if he could not hook Gloria before then, he would be back exactly where he started, with the devil to pay for arresting Calthrop against the weight of evidence . . . !

At the Yard he found a message, asking him to see the A.C. as soon as he got in. In Major Cavendish's room, he not only found the Assistant-Commissioner himself, looking worried, but a fiery, red-faced old gentleman with a moustache like a flying gull who turned out to be both an eminent Major-General on the War Office staff and David Calthrop's godfather.

"I should be very glad," barked the General,

"to have some reasonable explanation of this outrageous proceeding!"

"It's most regrettable, sir," Spears replied with exemplary patience, "but there happens to be a mass of circumstantial evidence pointing towards Mr. Calthrop and——"

"Circumstantial fiddlesticks!" the General interrupted. "I've known young David since he was so-high—taught him to handle a gun—gave him his first pony. The boy's just as capable of murder as I am of—of driving a tank! And his Commanding Officer agrees with me!"

"I'm sorry, sir," Spears explained, "but he was in the house five minutes before Count Ferrari was shot and no one saw him leave. His attachment to the lady was known to a number of people, one of whom heard him say that he was going up to Hampstead that night to have it out with her husband. There is also the question of two initials scribbled by the dying man . . . but, most important of all, who else could have done it?"

"You knew all this before," said the Assistant-Commissioner irritably. "So why suddenly spring this arrest now? Why not take some other tack for a change? The old man in the bed, for example . . . if he was hale and hearty enough to ring the bell, why shouldn't he have been able to shoot off a pistol?"

"He was always bed-ridden, sir," Spears replied, "so how could he have got at the gun? Besides, he liked Ferrari—we've evidence for that!"

"Hm! You must admit, General, it's maddening to have the one actual witness of the killing alive, and yet unable to utter a syllable or scrawl a line, even nod his head, to give us a hint of the truth!"

"No doubt, Cavendish, no doubt! But I still see no adequate reason for making a public show of my godson—to say nothing of his regiment!"

"Would you have preferred it if I'd charged the lady, sir?" suggested Spears, with the slightest suspicion of sarcasm.

"You'd probably have shown more sense if you had!" the General rapped back. "After all, I understand that she's bolted, which seems a fairly suspicious sort of thing to have done in the circumstances. Not," he added, "that I'm not sorry for her. Ferrari was a cad and she's damned good-looking—but why on earth did David have to get himself mixed up with a married woman?" He blew his nose violently to cover his show of emotion.

"I believe," said Spears slowly, "that only the Countess talking can clear up the whole business. I don't know what she can say, but it's quite plain that there must be something—and if she's as fond of your godson as I

believe she is, then his arrest ought to bring her back and make her open her mouth!"

The General stared and his face assumed an even riper hue than usual.

"So that's it!" he said. "You're proposing to use the boy as a decoy duck and ruin his career in the process. Very well, Mr. Spears—good morning, Cavendish—my solicitors are going to have something to say to you about this!" He nodded curtly to Cavendish and, with a final incoherent splutter, strode from the room.

The Assistant-Commissioner laughed. "His bark was always worse than his bite—even when he was my adjutant up in Gilgit!" He paused, then added, more seriously, "This is all very well, Spears, but what do you propose to do?"

It was a question that Spears could not for the life of him have answered, had there not been a knock at the door which opened to reveal Walcott, the A.C.'s secretary, bearing an envelope addressed to 'Inspector Spears—Urgent.'

"May I, sir—?" Spears asked.

"Go ahead!" said the A.C., and turned aside to fill his pipe.

Spears ripped open the envelope and glanced rapidly at its contents. His eyes lit up with relief. "You asked me just now, sir, what

I proposed to do—well, I propose to leave this afternoon for Amsterdam!"

"And why Amsterdam?"

"Because that's where the Countess Ferrari happens to be. She chartered a special plane out of Heston late last night, travelling with a Mr. Ezekiel."

"Ezekiel?" asked Cavendish quickly. "Who's Ezekiel?"

"Dutch Jew—Cornelius Ezekiel—Ezekiel and Tromp—trading as diamond merchants, actually international fences of rather a special kind. Ring had him looked up in Records. We bumped across the gentleman in the case of Mrs. Fiebleman's pearls. Ezekiel's line is to get stolen jewellery back to its original owners on a fat commission basis, no questions asked!"

"I remember now."

"So that puts the whole lot of them in Amsterdam—except Calthrop. She's there—Mr. Dudley Northcote's there—and if I'm not a Dutchman myself, the 'Peacock Throne's' there, too. What we don't know yet is how the ruby got over there and why the Countess needed to go after it. That's what I'm going to find out!"

The A.C. smiled a little wryly. "I don't want to damp your enthusiasm, Spears, but I have to remind you that you're supposed to be working on a case of murder, not a jewel

robbery—which incidentally has never even been reported as such!"

"I agree, sir," Spears replied, "but, though I can't tell you how or why, I'll lay you a hundred Dutch guilders to a Black Tulip, that on this particular occasion they're one and the same thing!"

* * * * *

Two hours later Simon Spears and Winthrop Bruce sat facing each other in one of the 'horse-boxes' of Sampson's Wine Bar in the Strand. They had just come away from Bow Street where David Calthrop had been brought up and at Spears' request remanded for a week 'in order that the police may be able to complete their case.'

"The thing I don't understand," said Bruce, as the waiter delivered two dock-glasses of Tio Pepe, "is why you chose to grab David rather than Gloria van Zuyl. I know that she couldn't have done it on the evidence, but it doesn't need any evidence to tell me that he didn't kill Ferrari; he simply isn't the type."

Spears looked up from his glass. "You mean," he said, apparently without interest, "that she *is* the type?"

"I wouldn't say for murder exactly, but she's a strange girl. That background of hers in

America—always in the limelight—and that kidnapping scare in Hollywood. Look at the crazy way she called me up from some night club in the dead of night and told me that she would broadcast. And then the other time, when I was down at Waterloo on a Television job—the day the *Ruritania* got in and we interviewed the people on the boat-train. . . ."

"Was *she* at Waterloo?"

"Yes, meeting someone, I suppose. She was getting rather pushed about by the mob on the platform and I offered to look after her. The day before, when I'd shown her round A.P., she'd been as sweet as pie, but on the station she was positively rude—didn't seem to want to talk to me at all and cut away as quickly as she could. She didn't seem to be the same person at all!"

Spears started and his knuckles whitened on the edge of the table. For quite a minute he stared thoughtfully into his glass. Then, almost casually, he asked: "You haven't any idea *who* she was meeting?"

"Not the slightest. I never saw her again. You might look at the passenger list, though. The Cunard people would have it still."

"Thanks," said Spears, and disposed of the last of his sherry in one remarkable gulp. "I'm going abroad this afternoon, but I'll check up on the *Ruritania* before I leave!"

The drone of an air-liner's engine is pleasantly conducive to slumber, but as the big K.L.M. Douglas streaked across the North Sea towards Schiphol, Simon Spears was far from asleep. Oblivious of the glorious blue sky overhead and the fantastic cloud-effects below, he was bent over a mass of notes and papers heaped up on the table in front of him. His expression was concentrated, his forehead was creased. Sergeant Ring, had he been there, would have recognized the process of fitting the pieces of the jigsaw together . . . On Spears' lap lay the heavy, beautifully bound Press Cuttings book which he had removed from the drawing-room at 'Five Cedars.' So far he had had no time to look through it exhaustively; now that he had it seemed to be an uninteresting enough record of Gloria van Zuyl's life in America—polo games, opera galas, horseshows, banquets at which she had been present—her visits to Miami, Nassau, Santa Barbara—it all sounded very dull and expensive and pointless!

He turned the pages almost automatically, as his thoughts reviewed all the features of this maddening, elusive case of his. Gloria van Zuyl . . . twenty million dollars when her grandfather died . . . pretending to loathe publicity and yet agreeing suddenly to the most personal publicity of all, Television . . . so nervous in front of the cameras . . .

chasing Northcote down to Fleet Street when she was supposed to be stranded with a breakdown in North London . . . admitting that that fabulous ruby of hers had been lost and yet refusing to do anything towards recovering it . . . practically cutting Winthrop Bruce dead on the platform at Waterloo . . . taking a flat in Bloomsbury under an alias and never living there . . . these and a dozen other unrelated and seemingly contradictory facts danced in his restless brain.

Below him the flat coast of Holland came into view, with its windmills and coloured patches of flowers. Now, for a moment, the book on his knees claimed his whole attention; the clippings in front of him dated from more than a year ago . . . The Van Zuyl Kidnapping Case . . . "a letter was received to-day . . . 500,000 dollars—or else! . . . steps Miss van Zuyl is taking to protect herself . . . police guards . . . bullet-proof car . . . "

Occasionally his fellow-passengers — especially a couple of frivolous young ladies, who rather liked his looks and would have appreciated his escort in Amsterdam, if they could have had it—cast looks in the detective's direction, looks that varied from the curious to the amused. But they got no change. Spears was intent on the press-cutting book.

As the plane began to circle over Schiphol Airport, he gave vent to a stifled exclamation

and, whipping out his pocket-book, extracted from it the brightly-coloured folder that reposed there. It was the passenger list for the last crossing of the *Ruritania,* west to east, which he had collected from the Cunard Offices on his way out to Croydon. He ran his eyes over the list of names in it, then suddenly brought his fist down with a resounding crash on the table in front of him. The two frivolous young ladies giggled in amusement, a French doctor, seated behind him, stared with professional inquiry. The stolid blonde Dutch stewardess tapped him on the shoulder. "Ve go down now. Your belt, please!"

Strapping himself into his seat and stuffing the various pieces of jigsaw into his brief-case, Simon Spears stared excitedly out at the neat Dutch landscape that was rushing up to meet him. 'I believe,' he was saying over again to a slightly bewildered and yet exultant inner self, 'I believe that I've got it!'

. . . . .

As the air-liner grounded, a chubby, dapper little Dutch police-lieutenant in plain clothes hurried across the field to meet it.

"We received your telegram, Mr. Spears," he said in correct but guttural English. "If there is anything that my department can do to help you . . .?"

"Many thanks," Spears replied. "It looks as though I'll be needing you!"

They strolled together to the airport building and Spears accepted his Dutch colleague's invitation to partake of a glass of schnapps in the great glass-fronted restaurant. "I'll be staying at the Hotel Batavia," he said, "and there are one or two people I'd be glad if you'd locate for me right away!" He picked up a menu from the table, wrote on it in block letters and handed it across to the Dutchman. "Here they are—and the sooner I know where I can find them the better!"

The names on the menu were four:

GLORIA VAN ZUYL (COUNTESS FERRARI)
DUDLEY NORTHCOTE
CORNELIUS EZEKIEL
CAROL LARRIMORE

Chapter XII

'Lets the Cat out of the Bag'

In spite of a strange bed and his own mounting excitement, Simon Spears slept well and dreamlessly. His sleeping-draught was the unemotional efficiency of the Dutch police authorities; their English colleague need not worry—the four people whose names he had given would certainly be at his disposal by midday the following morning at latest—a private room would be at his disposal for the ensuing interviews—they were only too happy to be at his service. . . .

And in this connection, while Spears dined, wined, dipped into a detective story with professional disapproval and finally slept, a number of curious happenings had taken place in various quarters of Amsterdam.

Mr. Cornelius Ezekiel—of the firm of Ezekiel and Tromp—was entertaining some ladies in the restaurant of the Carlton Hotel with the intention of going on later to a music-hall. With his coffee he received a brief note, couched in official language that ruined his appetite and ended his evening's jollification considerably earlier than he had intended. . . .

Six floors above, in the same hotel, the Countess Ferrari received a telephone message from the Police Department of Amsterdam which shook her severely. Its effect was not lessened by the fact that half an hour earlier an officious chambermaid had brought her a copy of the Continental *Daily Mail* in which she had read with dismay of David Calthrop's arrest. She was desperately tired—after a long hot afternoon spent in driving from hotel to hotel, searching for someone . . . so tired—but she couldn't sleep.

In a café, listening to the birdlike chatter of a colourful young lady called Lili, sat Mr. Dudley Northcote, late of the *Wire*—he had that evening received a telegram from London dismissing him from his paper. Several rounds of drinks and the said Lili's promising behaviour were beginning to put a somewhat rosier complexion on the evening, when a uniformed policeman arrived and requested an interview with him in private. Five minutes later, to her loud indignation, the lady was told to 'hop off home like a good girl,' while Mr. Northcote sought the privacy of his bedroom in an obscure hotel and the company of a bottle of whisky.

A second policeman, this time in plain clothes, rapped loudly at the door of the *Pension Leyden* and, although it was close on two o'clock in the morning, demanded that

the landlady produce for him a register of her guests. After examining the register he insisted upon personally interviewing Miss Carol Larrimore, a young American lady who had been staying quietly in the *Pension* for some days. The pyjamas and dressing-gown of Miss Larrimore, when she finally appeared, shook the stolid policeman to the core—but his sense of duty was strong enough to survive swansdown and *crêpe de Chine,* so the interview took place. After her visitor had departed and the landlady, twittering with curiosity, had retired to bed, Carol Larrimore sat by her open window, smoking one cigarette after another . . . wondering exactly what was going to happen now!

* * * * *

Spears was up in good time the next morning. Over coffee and rolls he checked up for the hundredth time on the notes, the photographs and papers in his brief-case, then went downstairs to the sitting-room which had been reserved for him by the Dutch police.

The room, which was part of a suite, met with his instant approval: no modern nonsense of chromium and mirrors, but good solid comfortable furnishing; a desk and chair for himself, back to the light; a deceptively com-

fortable settee facing the desk—and the light; a door to his left leading to a bedroom. Most satisfactory! He rubbed his hands and lighted his pipe, then flipped over the papers he had arranged neatly on the big desk and smiled. Unless he was a Dutchman, the case was finished . . . !

Dudley Northcote was the first of the visitors to arrive. He walked into the room with his usual jaunty step and arrogant lift of the head, but his face was lined and yellowish, and the fingers which lit a cigarette were unsteady.

"Mr. Northcote," began Spears, "I want to ask you some questions!"

"Fire ahead!"

"Why did you come to Amsterdam?"

"On an assignment for my paper . . . the 'Peacock Throne' story!"

"One day's work. Why haven't you gone back?"

The journalist grinned. "I like the Dutch," he said. "They know about drink—and their women don't go in for any nonsense about slimming!"

"I'm serious!" put in Spears with a frown.

"So am I, Inspector, damned serious. As a matter of fact, I've just heard that I've been sacked!"

"I've heard that, too!"

Northcote stood up. "Then why," he asked, "are you asking me a lot of damfool questions to which you know the answers? What do you want?"

"Mr. Northcote," said Spears gravely, "I want the 'Peacock Throne' ruby!"

Northcote laughed outright. "So you know that I took it, do you? Well, you certainly seem to know a lot!" He walked over and steadied his hands against the desk. "I haven't got it now, Inspector—and I wish I'd never set eyes on the confounded thing. I believe it has a hoodoo on it after all!"

"Listen," said Spears. "No charge has been preferred in connection with the theft—and I doubt if one ever will be. I'm only interested in it because I know that it has something to do with the murder of Count Benito Ferrari. But I want the stone — and I must know exactly what happened at Alexandra Palace the night Countess Ferrari was televised and the ruby was taken!"

"I tell you," repeated Northcote savagely, "that I haven't got the blasted stone! You won't get anything out of me, Mr. Spears; I've troubles enough of my own without being framed on a murder charge!"

The telephone rang. Spears answered it. "Send them up, please," he said. "Now, Mr. Northcote, you'd better go into the next room there and think things over. I've some other

people to see—including a friend of yours, I believe, Mr. Cornelius Ezekiel. I can give you ten minutes!"

At the mention of Ezekiel's name a curious expression had come into the journalist's eyes. "Very well," he said with a twisted smile. "At least I've one consolation. I shan't have to rot my intelligence, and corrupt other people's, by writing radio-drivel for the *Wire* any more!" The door to the inner room closed behind him.

A moment later Gloria van Zuyl and Mr. Cornelius Ezekiel were ushered in by a page-boy who placed a telegram in front of Spears and vanished. As he invited her to sit down, Spears looked at the heiress with interest. There were dark circles under her eyes and the hand that tried to light a cigarette was trembling.

"It wasn't very kind or sensible of you to run away, Countess!"

"You're right!" she said with an effort. "It was crazy. If only I could explain to you exactly——"

He interrupted her gently. "Maybe you'll be able to—now!" he said gently.

"But David——?"

"Nothing will happen to Mr. Calthrop. We wouldn't have arrested him if you hadn't forced our hand. But let me have a word with our friend Ezekiel first!" He turned to the

jeweller, a short swarthy Jew, the size of whose nose seemed to worry him, for he was constantly fidgeting with it.

"Mr. Ezekiel," he said, "I want to know why you visited this lady in England?"

Mr. Ezekiel blinked. "It was a private business negotiation," he said.

"Concerning a ruby?"

"I am not at liberty to say!"

"If you don't say," replied Spears tersely, "you may not be at liberty at all! Murder, in case you're forgetting it, is an extraditable offence—and it's a case of murder that I'm investigating here!"

The jeweller glanced sideways at Gloria. But she covered her lips with her handkerchief and said nothing.

"Come along!" said Spears impatiently. "I know most of it, you see, but I want some confirmation. Someone brought you a ruby belonging to the Countess here . . . the famous 'Peacock Throne'!"

"A certain gentleman," said Ezekiel with a shrug, "came to us with the ruby. He had the idea that it could be cut up and disposed of that way. But the 'Peacock Throne,' Mr. Spears, though it is a very large stone, is a very thin one—that is part of its rarity-value—and to cut it would be to make it practically valueless. Besides," he added with a specious smile, "we are a sound and old-established

business; we do not deal in stolen property; so I thought it best to say nothing to the gentleman but to return the ruby to its owner in return for a reasonable reward!"

"Quite so!" said Spears non-committally. "Now tell me, Countess, why you had to come all the way to Amsterdam, instead of completing your deal with Mr. Ezekiel in London?"

Gloria hesitated. "I didn't come here for the ruby," she said.

"Of course not!" murmured Spears with satisfaction. "Then just why *did* you come?"

"I came to—to find somebody!" Her voice was almost inaudible.

"Someone you thought had taken the ruby?"

"Yes—until Mr. Ezekiel here told me that the ruby had been taken by a man!"

"So you were looking for a woman! The same woman you went to meet when she arrived at Waterloo from the *Ruritania* —the woman who took a flat in Gordon Square?"

Gloria stared at him in bewilderment. "Why, yes," she said. "But I never went to Waterloo. I——"

She had no chance to finish her sentence, for the outer door of the suite was opened without ceremony, and into the room burst

David Calthrop with Winthrop Bruce close behind him.

"What the devil—?" began Spears, but his question was never answered, for with a cry of "David! Darling!" Gloria van Zuyl had flung herself into Calthrop's arms.

Spears busied himself tactfully with the telegram that lay on his desk. Bruce contemplated with interest the view from the hotel windows. Mr. Ezekiel coughed uncomfortably.

The telegram was from Major Cavendish at the Yard. It informed Spears that, owing to the pressure brought to bear from above by his godfather, the General, David Calthrop had had to be released. Spears looked up and beckoned to Cornelius Ezekiel. "I don't think I need trouble you any further," he said. "But you may as well know that we'll be keeping an eye on you in the future. If you're wise, you'll confine that business of yours to the Continent!"

The jeweller bowed awkwardly, muttered something to Gloria and slid from the room.

"I think," said Spears, "that your ruby will be returned to you without charge!"

"I don't care if I never see it again!" she burst out. "There *is* a curse on it—I know there is! I don't care how absurd it sounds —it brings death with it wherever it goes!"

"Don't worry, darling," said Calthrop, calming her. "That's all over now—and if Inspector Spears will only tell us what this is all about, we ought to be able to——"

His words were interrupted by a crash from the inner room—a crash that was unmistakably that of a revolver shot. For a moment they all stood as though petrified, then Gloria screamed and clung to Calthrop, and Spears and Bruce flung themselves at the bedroom door.

Sprawled across the bed was the body of Dudley Northcote. He had shot himself through the mouth, and the sight was not a pleasant one. On the table beside the bed lay a note scribbled in pencil:

Took the damned thing, of course. Too lovely to leave with a little fool who doesn't know its value or appreciate its beauty. She left it under my nose taking off her make-up that night. Can't sell it. No job. Debts, duns, drabs and drink. The hell with it!

Bruce returned to the sitting-room feeling rather sick. Spears, after telephoning the manager of the hotel and the police, locked the bedroom door behind him and returned to his desk. "Mr. Northcote," he said, "has saved us—and himself—a lot of trouble!" He shuffled the papers in front of him and, to give Gloria time to recover, turned to Bruce. "If

it's not being too curious, Mr. Bruce, how did you manage to get in on this?"

"Quite simple, Inspector. I went to meet David when he came out—and he suggested we should take the first plane over this morning!"

"And the B.B.C.——?"

"They owe me a holiday, but if they didn't —well, I should just be over here inspecting Dutch progress in Television!"

Spears laughed, then his face grew serious again as he turned to Gloria. She was now sitting up very straight on the sofa, with Calthrop's arm round her. "I think we had better get on," he said. "You were just going to tell me whom you came to Holland to find!"

"I was, Mr. Spears, but—but I haven't found her—that's the awful thing—you see, until I do find her I can't tell you how I—" She hesitated and her lips trembled pitifully.

"How you managed to be in two places at once?" suggested Spears gently.

"Two places at once!" exclaimed Winthrop Bruce. "What the devil do you mean by that?"

The telephone rang again. Spears picked up the receiver. "Ah," he said, "good. I was expecting her!"

As he replaced the receiver, there came a gentle hesitant knock at the outer door. "I mean—two places at once!" he said in answer

to Bruce's question, and added, "Come in!"

The door opened and they all turned to face the new-comer.

"Good God!" said Bruce.

"What on earth—?" stammered Calthrop.

"Carol!" exclaimed Gloria van Zuyl.

But Simon Spears only smiled, for the girl who stood in the doorway, except for the fact that her clothes were cheap and that the tinting of her hair needed renewing, was the living image of Gloria van Zuyl!

CHAPTER XIII

Explains Many Things

INSPECTOR SPEARS PERFORMED the introduction. "Miss Carol Larrimore," he said—and added, "Please take a seat, Miss Larrimore. My name is Spears—Scotland Yard. We needed you to complete our party!"

Calthrop rose and made room on the sofa for the new-comer who, with a slightly dazed air, sat down next to Gloria van Zuyl. The likeness between the two girls was fantastic. It was only when you saw them together that certain subtle differences were apparent; how, with her finer features and more delicate wrists and ankles, Gloria was the more aristocratic, the better-bred.

"But this is crazy!" began Winthrop Bruce.

"I agree," said Spears, "but did anyone ever suppose that the explanation could be anything else? I think you'd all better sit still for a few moments while I tell you the story as I see it; then, if I'm wrong on any point, the person concerned can correct me!"

There was no reply and so the Inspector, after a final glance over his papers, began.

"I owe a great deal of the story," he said, "to this book of press-cuttings on the table

here—and, since I stole it quite unscrupulously from the drawing-room at 'Five Cedars,' I must apologize first to the Countess Ferrari. The story begins, a few years back, when Charles van Zuyl was killed in a motor accident in Florida and his daughter Gloria became automatically the heiress to the fortune of her grandfather, Abraham van Zuyl, the Texas Oil King (your mother, I believe, Countess, had died some years earlier of typhoid fever in Havana).

"Abraham van Zuyl, who is now lying very close to death in a London nursing-home, came of Dutch parents of an extremely Protestant, almost Calvinist, turn of mind. He had always been disappointed in the wild character of his son Charles—and was prepared to find traces of the same wildness in his son's daughter, Gloria. He himself had always had to work hard for his living and it worried him that the dollars which he had wrung out of oil should be spent recklessly, first by his son, then by his granddaughter. He has always liked you, Countess, but at the same time he never quite trusted you!"

"Yes," Gloria admitted, "we've never been very close, grandfather and I—and yet, as you say, I've always felt that he liked me in his own queer way!"

"Three years ago," went on Spears, "you rented a house at Malibu, in California, where

the film stars have their homes. It was the time when there was a big kidnapping scare. The young son of a leading politician was 'snatched,' as they call it, and left to starve to death in the desert. Threats were received by Marlene Dietrich, Anna May Wong, the mother of Shirley Temple—and yourself. The Los Angeles police advised you all to take every precaution against the gangsters. Your grandfather showed himself in his true colours and begged you to be careful. He was ready to pay for any protection that you required—including the employment of body-guards and . . . the services of a double! And you were lucky enough to be able to find a double who matched you well enough to be able to deceive even the Press photographers. Her name was Carol Larrimore!" The detective paused and turned to Miss Larrimore. "May I ask," he said, "what you were doing in Los Angeles at the time?"

Carol Larrimore smiled wanly. "I was trying to become a movie star. I'd won a Beauty and Talent Contest back home in Dallas, Texas, and the newspaper paid my fare out to the coast! It wasn't any use, though!"

Spears nodded gratefully. "Anyway," he went on, "you were a big success as Gloria van Zuyl's understudy. No one spotted you—except an enterprising sob-sister on some paper in the Middle West—I have the clip-

ping of her column here—and the likeness was so fantastic that no other journalist thought of following her lead. After a while, the kidnapping scare died down and your job was finished. I've no doubt the van Zuyl family paid you well—and I imagine that you and Gloria struck up quite a friendship!" He paused and pulled strenuously at his pipe. "At this point we come back to Gloria van Zuyl. While watching a polo match at the Midhurst Country Club, Miss van Zuyl made the acquaintance of Count Benito Ferrari. The Count was probably in America in deliberate search of a wife; in any case he captured Miss van Zuyl after a whirlwind courtship and they were married with much pomp and circumstance in San Francisco.

"I don't know, of course, and it isn't my business, whether you were ever really in love with your husband, Countess, but I can quite understand that, with his good looks, hypnotic personality and fine family history, he must have been a very striking figure. He certainly had personality enough to win over your grandfather, who, I suspect, is also the least bit of a snob. Abraham van Zuyl settled money on you both and bought you a house on East End Avenue, New York. Everything was going very well and you believed that the misunderstandings between you and the old man were over—until you found out that your

husband was spending a great deal of his time with your grandfather and was, in fact, turning him against you. Benito Ferrari's intention must have been quite plain to you, as it is to me: he planned to persuade Abraham van Zuyl to settle his twenty-million-dollar fortune on himself, instead of on you!"

"Yes," Gloria admitted, "I guess that was his idea. It got in the end so that I couldn't even see grandfather alone!"

"Then Abraham van Zuyl had the first paralytic stroke which made him bed-ridden; there was also a recurrence of the kidnapping threats, and so Benito Ferrari removed you both to Europe. On the ship coming over, you made the acquaintance of David Calthrop; he was young and charming and understanding —and you fell in love with him. At first your husband did not object to the friendship, indeed he used it with your grandfather as another proof of your apparent flightiness. When you arrived in England, Ferrari bought 'Five Cedars' and settled you there. The house was ideal for his purpose, with a separate wing to house the old man, from whom you could be kept, on the grounds that it upset him to see you and might be fatal to his health. You realized now what your husband was up to—on many occasions, such as the night on which you took Mr. Bruce back to have a cocktail, you tried to see your grand-

father, but there was always Ferrari or one of his Italian servants to prevent you!"

Spears glanced at Gloria for confirmation, but she did not reply, so he went on: "Then one day, to amuse you and to pass the time, Mr. Calthrop took you up to Alexandra Palace to see how television was done. You had an entertaining afternoon, appearing privately in front of the camera, but when Mr. Bruce or one of his assistants suggested that you might appear for them as the star of their 'Picture Parade' you declined; you had had enough of strident publicity methods in America." He paused and glanced momentarily at his notes. "It was only later, when you thought over Mr. Bruce's invitation, that you saw in it a method of achieving what you most wanted—a personal talk with your grandfather which could not be interrupted by your husband. You therefore cabled to Miss Larrimore in New York and, when you had her reply that she could come over, told Mr. Bruce that you were ready to broadcast. Mr. Bruce was wrong when he told me that he had seen you at Waterloo Station at the arrival of the *Ruritania* boat-train; he had seen Miss Larrimore, who had just arrived by that train, and was quite naturally scared and puzzled by his greeting. Actually, I owe my solution of the mystery to Mr. Bruce; yesterday morning, when we were drinking sherry

together in London, he said something which gave me the clue to the whole business; he said, speaking of his meeting with Miss Larrimore at Waterloo, 'She didn't seem to be the same person at all!'

"As soon as I had the idea that there might be two Gloria van Zuyls—that is to say, one real Gloria van Zuyl and another woman enough like her to be able to take her place—a great many things began to fall into place . . . the reason why, although you had apparently settled in there, and then left, you still continued to telephone desperately to Gordon Square . . . the visit of a woman whom the doorman recognized as Gloria van Zuyl, to the offices of the *Wire* . . . and, most important of all, how your finger-prints could have been on the gun which killed Benito Ferrari in Hampstead at the moment when you were known to have been appearing in front of Mr. Bruce's cameras at Alexandra Palace!"

At the mention of Hampstead and the killing of Ferrari, Gloria had turned pale. She grasped Carol Larrimore's hand as though for support. Calthrop and Bruce leaned forward with fascinated attention. "Your idea," went on Spears, "was briefly this: your husband was a keen radio amateur and very vain about his researches; he had invented the screen which he used with your set at 'Five Cedars,' and you could be quite sure that, if you your-

self were to be televised, he would be at that screen, watching you—and that the servants, believing you to be at Alexandra Palace, would relax their watch on the wing of the house that contained your grandfather's sick-room. You therefore arranged to accept the television broadcast for Monday, April the 25th, leave the house in good time to get to Alexandra Palace, drive your Bentley car to some meeting-place on Hampstead Heath and hand it over to Miss Larrimore, who would carry on in your place in front of the cameras.

"As a matter of fact, the plan worked very well. Except for her natural nervousness—and the fact that her hair is not quite as—er—shall we say naturally blonde as your own (which was noticed by Miss Easton, the make-up girl)—Miss Larrimore completely deceived the staff at Alexandra Palace, including Mr. Bruce, several hundred thousand enthusiastic 'viewers,' and Mr. Dudley Northcote . . . and, but for two very important mishaps, you would have met Miss Larrimore after the broadcast, having seen your grandfather meanwhile and returned safely to 'Five Cedars' to read next morning the enthusiastic comments of the Press."

Gloria opened her mouth, as though to say something, but evidently thought better of it, so Spears, putting a match to his pipe, continued. "The first of these mishaps was due

to the presence at Alexandra Palace of the ruby. When Mr. Bruce's secretary asked you if you would mind wearing it for the programme, you agreed, never imagining what the result would be. I presume that you handed it over to your double when you met her with the car. When Miss Larrimore, probably out of nervousness, left it in her dressing-room after the broadcast, it was picked up by Dudley Northcote who had had his eye on it since the first afternoon when you handed it round at Alexandra Palace. When she found that it had gone, Miss Larrimore, who suspected Northcote, had only one thought in her mind: through carelessness she had lost a jewel valued at many thousands of pounds; she must get it back. She therefore followed Northcote in your car to his office in Fleet Street and asked the doorman if she could see him. I imagine, Miss Larrimore, that you didn't believe the man's story that Northcote wasn't there?"

"I did not," Carol Larrimore confirmed. "That was why I left the car down by the river and went back to keep a look out for him. He came out half an hour later, walked to some club round the corner and stayed there till five o'clock, when I followed him to the Dutch Air Line office in Horseferry Road. He booked a seat on the first plane over here, so I did the same and just had time to scoot

to Gordon Square in a cab and collect my passport and my clothes before the bus left for Croydon air-field!"

"You didn't think of consulting the police?" Spears asked.

"I didn't dare to, Mr. Spears. I wasn't at all sure why Gloria was paying me to put over the television business, but I knew very well that it wasn't anything that she'd want you people looking into! That's why I thought I'd trail Northcote myself—then, as soon as we got to Amsterdam, I went and lost him!" She paused and added quickly, "You see, I had no idea what had really happened to Count Ferrari!"

"Of course not!" Spears replied. "And that brings us to our second, and most important, point—what *did* happen to Count Ferrari?" He glanced quickly at Gloria van Zuyl and was relieved to find that her eyes were still steady. "I can figure out this much, Countess—that after you left your grandfather's room, you hurried to the place at which Miss Larrimore was to reappear and return to you the car and the ruby. You waited but she did not arrive. It was raining and you got pretty wet. In the end you had to return to 'Five Cedars' and for my benefit invent the story of the break-down of the car. You couldn't say anything about Miss Larrimore, because the whole yarn

would have sounded worse than unlikely without her presence in the flesh to prove the similarity between you. You had ultimately to admit to the loss of the ruby, but you didn't want to take proceedings to recover it for fear that our inquiries would blow the gaff on the whole thing.

"The immediate fly in the ointment as far as you were concerned was the unexpected visit of Mr. Calthrop to 'Five Cedars,' his interview with the Count, the fact that he could not prove the time of his departure, and the letters which your husband had scribbled in lipstick on the wainscoting of the bedroom upstairs. I imagine that the letters CA did not refer to Mr. Calthrop at all but to Carol Larrimore whom the Count had recognized on the television screen, thereby getting a clue to the fact that you were in the house and probably upstairs talking to the invalid. How he spotted the deception, I don't know—your television is good, Mr. Bruce, but not as good as all that yet—I believe it was because Miss Larrimore is left handed—a fact which I noticed in the Press photograph taken while she was touching up her mouth in the make-up room! As soon as Ferrari got the idea that things were not quite right, he bolted out of the room, leaving Mr. Calthrop alone there, and hurried to old Mr. van Zuyl's bedroom." Spears paused, and added with sudden inten-

sity: "The question is, What did he find there and what happened?"

Calthrop made a sudden move, as though to protect Gloria from that searching question, but though her face was tense and strained, her voice did not falter as she replied. "Everything you've said so far, Mr. Spears, has been quite correct—except for minor details—and you've got to believe me when I tell you the rest—you've just *got* to! I gave the car to Carol at about 8.20 and waited around on the Heath until a minute or so after 9.0. Then I walked back to 'Five Cedars.' The curtains of the drawing-room were not quite drawn and I could see Benito in there with David; he was fiddling around with the television set. There is a door in grandfather's wing that leads into the garden; I'd kept the key, so it was quite easy to let myself in and go upstairs. Grandfather was awake and I started in right away to tell him about Benito and how untrue the things he was saying about me were—particularly the things about David. He seemed pleased to see me—we'd always got on pretty well together in the old days—and asked me why I'd never come before. I was just telling him, when suddenly the door opened and Benito came in!"

She hesitated and the listening group bent forward, as though straining to drag the climax of the story from her.

"He was furious with me," she went on. "He used the most terrible language and grandfather ordered him to get out of the room. Then he started calling grandfather names and pulled out the pistol that he carried in his pocket. He was so angry that he started waving the pistol around, pointing it at both of us. I could see that grandfather was scared—after all, he'd been very sick for a year—so I grabbed Benito's wrist and tried to take the gun from him. We struggled for a while, knocking into the chairs and spilling all the things off the dressing-table. Suddenly —I don't know how it happened—there was a flash and a report—Benito let go of me and fell on to the floor. The gun dropped on to the white rug where you found it and there was smoke coming out of it. Grandfather gave a sort of groan and fell back on to the bed. I thought he must be dead. I didn't know what to do about Benito, so I ran out of the room and went out into the garden through the side-door. Out on the Heath I tried desperately to find Carol, but of course she didn't turn up, so by about eleven o'clock, when I was getting pretty wet through, I came back to the house—and the rest of the story you know!"

"Yes," Spears admitted, "the rest of the story I know. It's only a pity, Countess, that apart from your grandfather, who's never

likely to be able to tell us anything, there isn't a single witness to the things that happened in the bedroom!"

Calthrop jumped to his feet, his eyes blazing. "She's told you her story, Spears. Why the devil can't you believe it?"

Spears looked at him strangely. "Because, Mr. Calthrop, it isn't quite as easy for me to believe it as it is, quite naturally, for you!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that now we know how the Countess Ferrari's finger-prints came to be on that gun. It's my duty to ask her to accompany me back to London!"

"Under arrest?" Calthrop asked incredulously.

"No," said Spears, "not under arrest. You see, I haven't got a warrant for that—yet!"

Chapter XIV

. . . *And so to Bed*

THEY WERE HOMEWARD BOUND—and as the big air-liner swung westward towards London and a sunset that plumed the pale sky with scarlet, Winthrop Bruce sat back and drowsily wondered what they were going home to! Since the meeting that morning in the Hotel Batavia Simon Spears had scarcely spoken to any of the party; apparently doing without lunch, he had spent an hour or more in settling the matter of Northcote's suicide with the Dutch authorities; he had been rather thoughtfully present when Mr. Cornelius Ezekiel had called to return the 'Peacock Throne' to its owner; he had almost tersely requested them all to be packed and ready for the motor-car which he had ordered to take them out to Schiphol and the evening plane for Croydon; and at the moment he was sitting, well forward in the plane, scribbling industriously at his report.

The mystery was solved—certainly . . . but to Bruce, who was old-fashioned enough to be fond of his friends, it looked as though the real trouble, as far as Gloria and Calthrop were concerned, was only just beginning . . .

It was all very well for Gloria to talk about an 'accident'—but with the elimination of the ruby, of Northcote and the Alexandra Palace alibi, her chances of avoiding a murder trial must be slim in the extreme. It was ten to one, of course, that, with her youth and charm and the history of all she had had to go through with Ferrari, a clever counsel would be able to pull her out of the mess, but before then—! Bruce sighed and turned his attention to Miss Carol Larrimore whose profile was very pleasantly outlined against the sky. Now that was really a very attractive girl . . . !

But if Bruce was worrying, Gloria van Zuyl apparently was not. The removal of the strain of the past few days had brought the colour back to her cheeks, and there was a faint smile on her lips as she sat beside David Calthrop in the forward compartment of the machine, her hand unashamedly in his.

"Only ten minutes more!" she said.

Calthrop looked round. His face, in contrast to hers, was lined and worried. "I know," he muttered, "only ten minutes. For God's sake, Glory, do try and take this thing seriously. We're not out of the wood yet—by any means!"

"Poor David! I've given you an awful time, haven't I!" She smiled at him consolingly. "But it'll be all right, now that

Mr. Spears knows everything——!"

"Knows it—but do you suppose he believes it!"

"I told him the truth!"

"The truth!" There was despair in Calthrop's voice. "What's the truth worth, my dear, if you've no way of proving it! There's only one person who could confirm what happened between you and Ferrari that night—and the doctors say that he'll never be able to speak again. Oh, if only—" He broke off and stared miserably out at the lights which were beginning to spangle the blue haze of London.

"Grandfather? I know he'd tell them if he could. He was very sweet to me that night, before we were interrupted. He's a strong person, David; he'll get over that illness if he wants to!"

"No, Glory," Calthrop replied, his hand grasping at her wrist until it hurt. "No . . . I'm afraid that it's too late!" . . . and like an answer to his words were the *Evening News* bills which flared at them when a few minutes later they walked into the central hall at Croydon:

DEATH OF MULTIMILLIONAIRE

. . . . .

In one of the Customs offices at the airport

the four of them—Gloria van Zuyl, David Calthrop, Carol Larrimore and Winthrop Bruce—sat around a table, waiting for Spears. The air was blue with the smoke of many cigarettes. The news of the death of Abraham van Zuyl had cast a gloom over the lot of them.

"Why in God's name keep us hanging around here—!" exclaimed Calthrop edgily. "As if things weren't bad enough anyway, without that!"

After hurrying them through the Customs ahead of the other travellers, Spears had been about to lead the way out to the car for which he had telegraphed when Sergeant Ring had suddenly appeared from nowhere, like a stolid Genie of the Lamp, handed the Inspector an envelope and asked him to telephone Major Cavendish at Scotland Yard immediately. And so Spears had shepherded his little party into the Customs office and left them for close on half an hour to their own devices.

When he returned, Spears's face wore a very human look of satisfaction. A brief outline of the case over the telephone had drawn from the Assistant-Commissioner praise that was praise indeed—while the document which he carried in his hand seemed to write 'Finis' to the whole affair with a completeness that appealed to his sense of the dramatic.

He glanced at the four strained faces that looked up when he opened the door. "Take

it easy!" he said. "And listen carefully while I read you what I've got here!"

He sat down at the table and laid in front of him three sheets of thin paper that were covered with thin, spidery handwriting in pencil. "As you've all seen," he began, "Mr. Abraham van Zuyl died early this morning. He was never able to speak but, before he died, he recovered the use of his hands . . . and he was therefore able to write down a statement of what happened in his bedroom the night Count Ferrari was killed. I have that statement here. It has been witnessed by the nurse and by the specialist, Sir Everard Miles!"

Gloria stifled a sob. David Calthrop, with an audible sigh of relief, leaned forward in his chair.

"I know," read Spears, deciphering with difficulty, *"that I am going to die—I am not kicking about that because life for the last year has been pretty much like death anyway. I should have liked, though, to have seen my granddaughter Gloria again before I went. Gloria and I did not always see eye to eye over things, but she is a good girl at heart, and I am sorry now that I allowed that scoundrel Ferrari to turn me against her. I made a bad slip-up over Ferrari. I guess it was because most of Gloria's young men were the smooth useless type—and Ferrari had guts anyway.*

"I know now, of course, that Ferrari was simply after my money. It may be some consolation to Gloria to know that he failed to make me change my will and that the money therefore comes to her as was my original intention. When Gloria came up to see me on the night of Monday, April the 25th, I was surprised to see her. It was several months since she had been into my room. Ferrari had told me it was because she never had time to—she was too busy with social engagements and with some young fellow called Calthrop who was making our name the subject of gossip. I realize now that Ferrari was telling me a lie, that he was actually keeping my granddaughter away from me.

"Gloria seemed to be in a great hurry. She told me the truth about her husband—and I believed her. She is very like her father sometimes, and I loved Charles in spite of his damfool goings on. We were still talking when Ferrari came into the room. He was very angry to find her there and they started to quarrel. It was terrible for me to have to lie there, unable to move, listening to the vile names he called her. In the end he pulled out a gun and I think he meant to shoot her, only Gloria grabbed hold of his arm. They swayed around the room, knocking things over; then, suddenly, the gun went off and Ferrari fell down on the floor. The pistol was in Gloria's

hand but I swear that she did not fire it—that it was somehow discharged in the struggle. Gloria dropped the pistol and ran across to my bed. I suppose that the shock had been too much for me, for though I wanted to take her in my arms and tell her that I did not blame her for what had happened, I found myself unable to move or speak. I think she must have been frightened by my looks because she gave a little cry and ran out of the room. After she had gone, I had just strength enough to throw my body against the bell-push beside the bed. That is all that I remember.

"I am making this statement of my own free will in order to clear my granddaughter, Gloria Grace van Zuyl, from any possible accusation of murder.

(Signed) ABRAHAM VAN ZUYL.
Witnessed by EVERARD MILES,
MILLICENT EDWARDS (Nurse)."

Spears looked up. "There'll be formalities, of course! But otherwise, Countess, it looks as though all your worries are over!"

Calthrop put his arm round Gloria's shoulder. "Darling," he said, shakily, "darling, I'm so glad!"

"Mr. Bruce," murmured Carol Larrimore, "I'm feeling awfully hungry. Would you happen to know a place in this town where a young lady could get a Hamburger?"

Winthrop Bruce threw a sidelong glance at David and Gloria. They seemed, quite understandably, to be entirely absorbed in each other. "I would," he said. "That is, if Inspector Spears will give us a lift as far as the West End!"

. . . . .

One further extract from the personal diary of Miss Josephine Easton:

"Got half a day off for the Calthrop-van Zuyl wedding. 'Winnie' pretended to be tough about letting me go. But as he was being best man he couldn't very well keep it up. St. George's and all the trimmings! She looked very sweet—and he's good-looking, though a little like the man in the Arrow Collar ads! 'Winnie' quite terrific in gardenia, Ascot tie and striped pants. Wonder who the girl was he was paying so much attention to. Rather like someone I'd seen before but couldn't place. It may have been that if she'd had fair hair instead of dark she'd have been rather like G. van Z.

"A.P. seemed a bit flat in the afternoon—or was it reaction from High Society and champagne-in-buckets? Steve very cross because 'Winnie' wouldn't back his idea of televising the ceremony. Somehow we all seem a bit duller since Northcote faded out.

Queer how really nasty people liven things up. His successor is a conscientious little rabbit with a lisp who drives Jim even wilder than N. used to!

"Dining with Jim to-night. He's made such a fuss about the place and punctuality—to say nothing of orchids (!!!) that I'm beginning to wonder whether weddings are catching! Here's hoping, anyway . . ."

THE END

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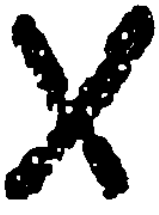

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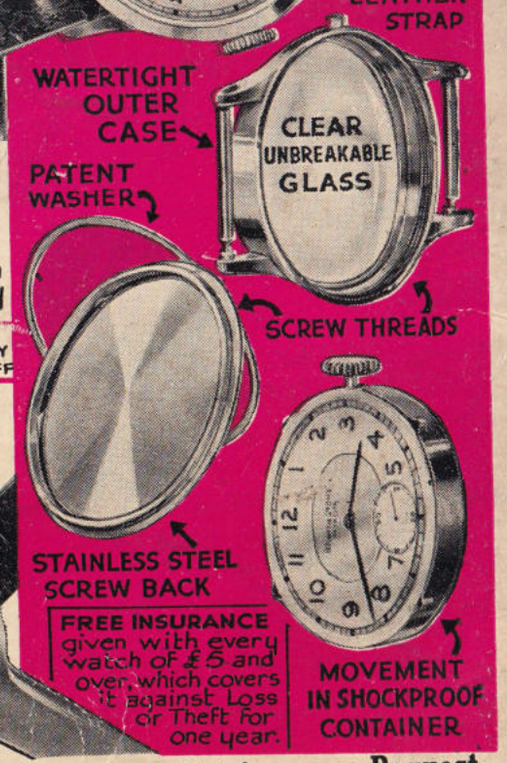

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